

THE HEROINES OF HINDUSTHAN

జానకి బెన్, పోర్ట్ బ్లూయిస్,

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AUTHOR'S NOTE.

Ever since I read the Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan by Lieutenant Colonel James Tod with the most blissful emotions, I have been an ardent admirer of his memorable work. Even in the very first reading, I felt as if I were in a trance and was eagerly attracted and very much impressed by the most chivalrous and magnanimous bearing of Maha-Rana Pratap Singh of Mewar, in his wars of independence with the great Mogul Emperor for a quarter of a century. Pratap was the worthiest descendant of Sri Ramachandra, of the illustrious Solar race and won universal approbation as the paramount Patriot-Prince of India. I read many works about the brave, noble, and gallant Rajputs and the contemporary Mogul sovereigns and eventually completed my great work on "Rana Pratap Singh" in Telugu, in five 'Aswasams' covering over one thousand and nine hundred verses. I am glad that all the great scholars, poets and eminent papers have expressed the unanimous opinion that the work is second only to 'Mahabharata' by Tikkana and my grateful thanks are due to the authorities of the three Universities of Andhra, Madras and Mysore for having prescribed the work as a text book for the B. A. degree examination and the Intermediate examination in their Colleges.

Colonel James Tod was the greatest admirer of Rajasthan and her valorous people. He enthusiastically declared that he was the adopted

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son of Mewar. He discharged his duties as a Political Agent of Rajaputana. He even took pride in acting as the 'Bracelet-bound-brother' to many a Rajput Queen of Udaipur, Boondi and other states. He spent the best part of his life in Rajasthan. He worked among the Rajputs, admired their characters and adored their virtues. Writers, who merely load their works with dry facts and numerical figures, as though they were the ware-houses and retail shops, may be appreciated as true and great historians. But no country can ever produce a sincere and impartial recorder of events, who loved the people of whom he wrote, with a heart so delicate and sympathetic and with a pen so all-accomplished as James Tod. He was a staunch advocate of the Rajput race and Rajasthan could never possess a more honourable friend. He worked for twenty-five years for the uplift of the country and earned the name—'The Restorer of Rajaputana'. Even after his retirement he served India with his spirit till the last breath remained in him, through the medium of the Royal Asiatic Society.

After the period of Ramayana the Solar Race considerably increased in population and a great portion of the people emigrated into the surrounding states. Both males and females grew equally war-like and resolute. Ladies were highly cultured and were firmly impressed that feminine dignity and honour were far superior to life. Well-versed, as they were, in the traditional lore, they imbibed the highest sentiments of undaunted

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courage, patriotism, national glory and independence and exhibited the highest traits of personal characters. When the spark of the virtuous indignation was ignited, many were the daring deeds they accomplished, which appalled and overawed even champion-warriors and mighty heroes. In emergencies and in imminent dangers they exhibited an utter disregard for life and committed the fatal, 'Johar' in their thousands and tens of thousands!

Truth is sacred and divine. It is dearer and more precious than any other thing in this world. Blessed is the heart that enjoys its sublime sweetness. Pure and real history exhilarates the soul and can elevate a whole nation. I have selected some of the best episodes of the worthies of eternal splendour for my humble pen-pictures and arranged in the form of the present work. I took immense pains in collecting the names of the various states and persons. No less was the trouble experienced in ascertaining and fixing the exact dates and periods of the various episodes contained therein.

Those of the Indian poets, who are denied the capacity to study and appreciate the foreign lore, are confronted with the difficulty of finding new themes for writing poetry. A new era has, of late, dawned and poets are attempting to render historical stories into beautiful poetry. Times have changed; and poets too, of course, have to change their thoughts and themes. I have, however, with a thousand apologies to 'Andhra

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Mata,' written this work in English with a view to furnishing some valuable historical matter to the poets of the Indian languages. I shall feel myself highly blessed, if this Portrait-Gallery be translated into some of the Indian languages by more patriotic and more accomplished pens. Books of this kind are most opportune to-day—dealing with themes thrilling with undaunted heroism, inflexible patriotism, sterling characters and unbounded sacrifices. Who would not bubble up with emotion and ecstasy, while reading the history of the chivalrous Rajputs, who struggled hard for centuries of oppression and depression with the foreign enemy, sacrificing all dear and near to their hearts and recklessly courting destruction to maintain the national liberty and the religious grandeur of their illustrious forefathers! Who would not melt away at the mere mention of the most soul-stirring and sublime adventures of the Rajputs! “Ereathes there a man with soul so dead?”

I humbly think by writing ‘Chanda Nripala Charitra’ ‘Rana Pratap Singh Charitra’ and the present work, ‘the Heroines of Hindusthan,’ I have done at least a fraction of my sacred duty towards the Rajputs, the most renowned people of India, whose history I have made my paramount duty to study. I shall be eagerly looking forward to the day when, there will spring up in our esteemed Andhra Province, a galaxy of poets, sufficiently enlightened and independent, who will seek no other remuneration for their literary labours than

the fulfilment of the real 'Hero-worship.' I leave this, the humble fruit of my research of many years, to the candid judgment of the world.

Ah, how Tod hated the sulphurous smiles of the honourable villains!

May the eternal soul of Colonel James Tod be highly blessed! What pious sentiments, noble feelings, sublime regards, glorious views and divine aspirations heaved and heaved within his bosom! He sighed and sighed over the glorious Rajput past! With what anxiety he burnt for the return of the departed Rajput glory and for the revival of the supremacy of the Hindu religion, you will know, dear reader! if you just have a dip into the following passages, which I quote from his *Annals and Antiquities*.

"In march 1818 I again visited the shrine (Eklinga on the mount Aboo) on my way to Udaipur (I first visited in 1806) to announce the deliverance of the family from oppression and to labour for its prosperity. While standing without the sanctuary, looking at the quadriform divinity and musing on the changes of the intervening twelve years, my meditations were broken by an old Rajput chieftain, who, saluting me, invited me to enter and adore Baba Adam 'Father Adam' as he termed the phallic emblem. I excused myself on account of my boots, which I said I could not remove and that with them I would not cross the threshold:— a reply which pleased him." (page 445).

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"I deviated from the direct course homewards (to Udaipur)". (page 675).

"I look upon Mewar as the land of my adoption". (page 553)

"Ill-fated Mewar! all our hopes are blasted; this second visitation has frustrated all our labours. The frost of December, which sunk the mercury to 27° as we passed over the plains of Marwar, was felt throughout Rajwarra and blighted every pod of cotton. All was burnt up but our poor exiles comforted themselves amidst the general sorrow with the recollection that the young gram was safe. But even this last hope has now vanished; all is nipped in the bud. Had it occurred a month ago, the young plant would have been headed down with the sickle and additional blossoms would have appeared. I was too unwell to ride out and see the ravages caused by the frost." (page 569).

"Mewar is a kind Mother and she yields her chunna crop without water". (page 569).

Colonel Tod had Bala Govinda Swami and Yati Jnana Chandra as his preceptors and Gurus.

I should be failing in my duty, if I forgot to express my grateful thanks to my beloved and worthy friend, Mr. A. K. Muni, who encouraged me to complete this work. My thanks are also due to the Proprietors of the Janaki Printing Works, Proddatur, for their kind obligations.

OPINIONS.

India has a great mission to fulfil. She is still the spiritual dynamo of this world - a world mad after material wealth. Munitions and machine-guns, aeroplanes and armaments are the sole pre-occupations of the so-called civilised Nations. And if India is to be the liberator, she has to make good her right to teach, by regaining her rightful place, in the comity of nations. And to such a movement of National revival, worthy sons of India, like that talented author of 'Rana Pratap Singh' a work which has won the esteem and admiration of the entire-Telugu Literary world, have rendered yeoman service, by reminding us, in spirited verse, those ancient ideals, which, though buried outwardly in ashes, have still in them, the lingering fire of revival. And D. Rajasekhara Satavadhani has placed us under a deeper debt of gratitude by his recent book "The Heroines of Hindusthan," written in a language which bespeaks the spirit of patriotic fervour, that has animated the author. The delightful sketches, so skilfully drawn, are interesting reading and will serve to remind us of the glory, that has but dimmed at the present moment, only to shine forth in resplendent splendour, in the near future. My heartiest congratulations to the author!

N. S. NARASIMHA CHARI,

P. S. Judge.

I cannot sufficiently express my heart-felt thankfulness at your having so kindly afforded me the great pleasure of hearing the stories of your excellent work the "Heroines of Hindusthan" direct, read by you. I am very much delighted with the superb style and lucid language, in which the work is written. You possess a very powerful imagination and have presented the episodes with great ability and admirable address. I appreciate the loftiness of your thought and the closeness to historical facts.

You have dived deep into the historical mines of the great Rajasthan and brought out nuggets of gold. You have powerfully demonstrated that our country stands unrivalled in point of the highest eminence of womanhood. You have done your most paramount duty not only to Andhra-Mata but also to Bharata-Mata by giving the highest specimens of unparalleled devotion, undaunted patriotism, unlimited sacrifice and unimpeachable virtue.

The blooming innocence of Krishna Kumari, the ever resigning resourcefulness of Koorma Devi, the all forgiving nature of Padmini and the unbounded sacrifice of Karnavati are depicted in the choicest and the best manner. The reader cannot but feel the most blissful emotions while reading the chivalrous speech of the Mewari Joshi Bai. This is a masterly production, which every Indian should read. Where women are exalted, the whole nation is exalted.

I would earnestly wish the political party, now in power, should make it a sacred duty to patronise this magnificent work as the work of a true poet not in any way inferior to any work of the greatest politician.

V. VASANTHA RAO, B. A., M. L. C.

Chairman Municipal Council.

The gifted author's English would have been more English English, if his Heroines had been the English! Unlike the Heroines of many a modern author in rustling silks and flowing laces, fit to be hooked on the spot by the Municipal Health Officers under the Adulteration prevention Act, Mr. Rajasekhara's Heroines, with eyes sparkling with pearly tears and with lips beaming with sunny smiles—these paragons of beauty and virtue parade even now before our mental eye in the garments of fire, as the author nicely puts it. The Indian sky is now ablaze with them indeed.

Excellent! the author's mighty pen has not run in the crude old ruts of monotony and rigma-role. Alas! at the present day, the University students are on the tops of the greasy poles which I do not know where will land them! I hope the Universities will give the benefit of this great work to their students, who are now withering away in the bud in the most uncongenial, alien, educational atmosphere. The Indian wifehood, motherhood

and womanhood are so beautifully depicted that Tod was justified in his opinion, "In India, men strike not women even with a blossom."

The author's name alone is a guarantee that the work will not flag in interest as it proceeds. It is full of eternal fires of Heroism. This splendid work alone is the most fitting reply to Miss Mayo of numberless dreary winters.

A. K. MUNI.

I have read your excellent work, "The Heroines of Hindusthan," with much pleasure.

Being a poet you have thrown the gold robes of your poetic imagination around a subject, which is by itself noble and attractive. The dramatic note introduced into the narrative has added to the poignant passion and romantic charm of the stories. I wish your work every success.

Diwan Bahadur,

K. S. RAMASWAMI SASTRI,

(Retired District and Sessions Judge)

I have gone through your excellent work "the Heroines of Hindusthan." For its simple and chaste style as for the exalted topics dealt with in it, the book deserves wide popularity and comes at a time when English text books may advantageously deal with the uplifting themes of our ancient tradition through which alone it is possible to develop

the emotions of the youth of the country in its formative period of life.

BHOGARAJU PATTABHI SITARAMAIA,

President, Andhra Rastra Congress Committee

& Member, Congress Working Committee.

The themes are well conceived and ably presented. You have a very powerful imagination. It ought to be so with you, the author of Rana Pratap Singh.

Dr. C. NARAYANA RAO, M. A. P. H. D.,

“The Heroines of Hindusthan” deserves to be popular as it deals with a very interesting subject and Mr. Rajasekhara Satavadhani deserves to be congratulated on commemorating the Historical women of India.

DR. C. R. REDDY, M. A. (Cantab) M. L. C.

Vice Chancellor, Andhra University.

I have read your latest work, “The Heroines of Hindusthan” with great delight and interest. The choice of the subject is indeed superb and the style in which you have told us the Historic tales is charming. Such books are the need of the hour

when the value of virtue, no less than of patriotism, has to be realised by an increasing number of men and women of our country. The women of India have a definite place to fill in the Indian Renaissance and a book like 'the Heroines of Hindusthan' will give them both courage and strength.

M. VENKATARAMAIAH

(Retired District and Sessions Judge)

I have read the book "the Heroines of Hindusthan" with great interest. The stories present to us a vivid picture of the past glory and military prowess of the sons and daughters of Hindusthan in refreshing contrast to our present day degeneration.

The events in most of the stories are thrilling and dramatic and have been described in lucid but vigorous language. This is a book which every patriotic Indian ought to read.

I should think that with the great poetic talent of the "Kavi Simha" the descriptions and the metaphors in several places, which are eminently Indian in outlook and imagery, would have shone better in the vernacular setting.

Rao Bahadur,

M. NARASIMHAM, B. A., B. L.,

Madras Public Service Commission.

The book "the Heroines of Hindusthan" is written in a picturesque language and should prove interesting.

A. S. P. IYER, M. A., I. C. S., F. R. S. L.,
Bar-at-law, District and Sessions Judge.

The author of the book under review needs no introduction as he is a well known poet to whose credit stands the monumental poetical work 'Rana Pratap Singh.' We are glad to point out that the poetical work referred to, has been prescribed as a text book for the B. A. examination in the Universities of Andhra, Madras and Mysore.

We have much pleasure in going through the book under notice "the Heroines of Hindusthan" which abounds with episodes which have marked an epoch in the history of India. The book will, we hope, be appreciated and widely read in as much as it will contribute to one's knowledge about the tradition, culture and heritage of India of the past.

"THE FORWARD"

Poet Kavi Simha, D. Rajasekhara Satavadhani of Proddatur is a man of fame in that part of India. He is the author of the Monumental Telugu Poetical work "Rana Pratap Singh." The

work, we understand, has been prescribed as text book for the B. A. Degree examination in all the three Universities of South India eg., Andhra, Madras and Mysore and is held by all eminent scholars and poets as being second only to the famous Mahabharata.

The present work "the Heroines of Hindusthan" which is his latest publication, abounds in soul-stirring and thrilling episodes of the most chivalrous Heroines of Hindusthan. It is full of unbounded patriotism, unswerving devotion and unlimited sacrifice. One will find poetry in a guise of prose in his composition. It is a masterly production of genuine feeling which the author bears for Rajasthan.

A perusal of this small book will make one enjoy the most blissful emotions.

"THE AMRIT BAZAAR PATRIKA."

One of the tragedies of English education in India to-day is that it rules out so much that is primarily Indian and native to the soil. We are far better acquainted with the folk and the legends of England than we are with our own and so with History. In the present book "The Heroines of Hindusthan" the author gives us a series of incidents from the lives of India's bravest daughters of whose existence we are left ignorant if educated in the usual way, as such books tend to promote

knowledge of our own history and our own glorious past their appearance is to be welcomed. The reading matter is interesting and informative.

“THE INDIAN HOME.”

The noble and heroic role that Indian women filled in the past, forms the inspiring theme of this book. The author has culled striking instances of such heroism, from the annals of the Rajput History and retold them in English, in a narrative form. The stories include those of Joshi Bai of Bikaner, who shamed the great Akber into virtue, Krishna Kumari, the Iphigenia of Udaipur and Queen Karnavati Devi, whose tact and diplomacy saved Chittore from the enemy. There are eleven stories in all. The author has done well to leave alone some of the more generally known tales like those of Rani Padmini of Chittore or the “Joan” of Jhansi.

“THE HINDU”

The courage and honour for which Rajput women have been always famous are vividly portrayed in his latest work “Heroines of Hindusthan” by Mr. D. Rajasekhara Satavadhani. The author takes us through medieval chivalry in Mewar, Marwar, Udaipur, Chittore and other famous Rajput states, the internecine feuds between rival chieftains, the intrigues of the Mogul rulers and shows how the Rajput Princesses’ devotion to duty and honour had always characterised the

policy of those countries, irrespective of all consequences. Mr. Satavadhani had written his book in an emotional vein. The language is medieval in keeping with his theme. Excepting for that incomparable volume "Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan" there have been very few inspiring books on Rajput valour, but here we may find a successor to James Tod.

"THE MADRAS MAIL."

I have had the opportunity of going through the contents of "The Heroines of Hindusthan" written by Mr. D. Rajasekharam. The book abounds with picturesque descriptions of tense moments depicted in beautiful and elegant style, and the Swayamvara episode of Samyukta serves as a good example in that respect. The author's choice of some of the best heroines of India as the subject matter of his book is very appreciable at the present day when the women's movement in India is gathering momentum from day to day. The book is worthy of being read by boys and girls throughout the length and breadth of India.

J. SITAMAHALAKSHMI, B. A.

For those who would dig deep for the gems of saga and romance and legend, India holds an inexhaustible store-house of them. Yet the strange fact remains, that countless generations of students and scholars have been mostly fed on nothing but

Puranic themes in every type of vernacular literature and in every class of study — themes which are so familiar to every Indian from infancy, as to render them stale and monotonous.

To me it seems quite futile to bemoan the absence of Indian patriotism, knighthood and chivalry in the English literature studied in our schools and colleges. It is our countrymen and women, who, if any, should explore the unlimited resources of history and folklore and make the hidden treasures accessible to the wizard pen of poet and author for their magic creations.

I ardently admire, Mr. Rajasekhara Satavadhani's labours in this direction and heartily wish that the burning enthusiasm revealed in every page of the 'Heroines of Hindustan' will kindle kindred flames in the breast of many an inspired artist in the world of letters, to the delight of all book lovers.

H. KAVERI BAI, B. A., L. T.

Author of "Meenakshi's Memoirs."



SAMYUKTA.

India was in the zenith of her prosperity and national grandeur in the latter part of the twelfth century and was divided into four great kingdoms. The first and the most important was Delhi, under the Chohan Emperor Prithwi Singh. Mewar, under the Ghelote Maharana Samar Singh, was the next most conspicuous. The kingdom of Canouj, under the Rahtore Monarch Jaichand, extended even into the Deccan. Anhulwarah occupied no less important position and was ruled by Bhola Bhim.

All the Princes and Chieftains in India paid homage and feudal service to one of these great kings and acknowledged their supremacy. Prithwi Singh had one hundred and eight subordinate Princes under him. Samar Singh was at the head of the twenty two principalities of Rajasthan. The Sovereign of Canouj was Lord of thirty six Royal Races. Bhola Bhim exacted tribute from many a mighty vassal.

Maharana Samar Singh espoused the sister of Prithwi Singh and loved him tenderly. Prithwi Singh, though a great emperor, looked to him as a parent. Samar Singh assisted his brother-in-law in all his martial pursuits. The Lords of Canouj and Anhulwarah were thick friends.

Anang Pal Tuar, the last Emperor of Delhi overlooking the claims of Jaichand, his grandson by the first daughter, made Prithwi Singh, his grandson by the second daughter, Emperor of Delhi after him. Jaichand refused to acknowledge the supremacy of Prithwi Singh. Thus the two Princes were at constant wars with each other.

Prithwi Singh was also Lord of his ancestral states Ajmir and Sambhar. He was highly versed in music, both vocal and instrumental. He was a great patron of literature and arts and Chandra Bhattacharya, the greatest of the bards of Hindusthan, was his state poet. India never shed her glory so radiantly as she did during the reign of this illustrious and magnanimous sovereign.

Prithwi Singh was seated on his imperial throne in the great Audience Hall at Delhi and Chand, the bard, was to his right. Maharana Samar Singh of Mewar, Raja Rajendra Pujan Singh of Amber, Maharows Hamir Singh and Gambhir Singh of Aser, Achales of Jaisalmir, Chandan Singh of Lohadurggarh, Rana Singh of Sindh, Poundraka Chandra of Lahore, the Purihara of Cashmere, the Chalook of Raghugarh and the Princes of Peshawar, Guzarat, Chedi and other states adorned the splendid seats around the big table in the front.

"Worthy Princes! and Friends!" observed the Emperor "you all know how Jaichand of Canouj refused to acknowledge the supremacy of Delhi and many were his plots and conspiracies

against me. Though I could have easily brought to bear considerable sway over him, I left him entirely to himself. He had celebrated the grand rite of 'Aswamedha' and fixed Friday, the day-after-to-morrow, as the day of 'Swayamwara' of his daughter. He had issued circular invitations to all the principalities in this vast continent except to Delhi and Mewar. I over-looked even this omission of respect and never even remembered it. But early this morning, an old priest brought me a billet urging me to go to Canouj."

He gave the letter to the bard. Chand received it with both the hands. "This was transmitted" he said, glancing at the contents "by the Princess Samyukta and runs thus."

"Oh! King of thousand Kings! Pray, pardon me!
For this my billet sent in anxious haste!
The sun shines high above - the lotus smiles-
The clouds dance in the sky - the peacock plays.
I am the lake of which thou art the swan-
I am the bud - thou art the summer bright-
I am the sweet rose - and thou the soft wind-
Without thee, the Heaven would be a Hell.
The swan never could with a duckling go-
Nor could the fine cuckoo espouse a crow-
And no maid till now did a monkey woo-
Oh! Lion of earth! my heart leaps to thee.
Thou bear'st the world - could I a burden be?
I would be thy treasure - pray, turn thy heart-
The brave deserve the fair - forget me not
Ever thine loving Princess Samyukta."

The letter created a sensation of joy and emotion among the Princes. "I would entertain no sympathy towards the Gaharwar King," exclaimed Hamir Singh "He must be taught a lasting lesson and this adventurous enterprise be worth our engagement."

"I would annihilate the Rahtore Hydra" intervened Palhan Singh of Amber "I would not however like to let go the most precious diamond on its head but would wish to decorate the diadem of Delhi with it."

"Earnest was the appeal of the Princess" said Gambhir Singh "and no mortal, possessing a heart, could fail to respect it as a command. Her request must never go unheeded."

"Jaichand is no insignificant monarch," observed the elderly Achales "He is one of the most potent sovereigns in India. He has a very extensive kingdom and many tributary Princes serve him. His army is so enormous that before the rear could move off, the van might have reached the field. It should therefore be most risky to enter his capital weakly equipped. So, would I seriously urge that all the plentiful resources at our command should be made the best use of and success ensured."

The delivery of the Prince of Jaisalmir, ripe with experience, produced a deep impression on all the Princes, who set their heads and minds together to consider the question with seriousness.

"I took all possible precautions to meet the situation." joined Chand. "Two routes lead to Canouj. The one, I chose, goes through Siyona and Siron along the Ganges. At two places we could change horse and at three places arrangements had been already made for sumptuous food. I would, with all the emphasis at my command, urge that we must venture upon this enterprise and my Royal Master must bear away the Princess to Delhi. Now, five thousand veteran warriors should come forth to accompany us.

There was a pause. The Princes consulted in the meantime with one another.

"Every one of the sixty four Princes assembled here" roared Pujan Singh "could put forth sixty four champions, each of whom had seen sixty four battles. Life itself should lose its charm if we stepped back from this attempt."

"Sixty four Princes with sixty four warriors each" responded the bard "would come to four thousand one hundred and sixty and with eight hundred and forty champions from the mighty Regulars of the Chohan army of Delhi, all commanders of the superior rank, each of whom had fought one hundred battles - the number comes to five thousand. The whole world should witness our daring deeds with startling amazement."

Immense was the thrill felt through the Hall. "My whole life had been" exclaimed the Lord of Sambhar "a succession of daring exploits and reckless actions. Let the Rahtore feel the

sharpness of the Chohan blade. No time should be lost. As usual, the stalwart Sovereign, Maharana Samar Singh of Mewar, the foremost warrior Prince of the age, would act the chief Commandant and supreme Director during this emergent campaign. My brother Chandra Rao would be in charge of Yoginipoor (Delhi) and would despatch suitable contingents to meet us on our return from Canouj."

"I heard my brother-in-law, Prithwi Singh, often complain" observed Samar Singh "that Canouj was not paying its quota of tribute to him but he did not understand that Jaichand had been accumulating the annual tributes in the shape of Samyukta, whom, in the auspicious moment, in the presence of hundreds of Princes, he perhaps wanted to make a present of to him on the morning of the day-after-tomorrow. There should absolutely be no fear of a failure or a defeat in this undertaking. But we should be put to a most disgraceful test when we were to be badly chased by the Rahtore cavalry from behind. Myself, your chosen commander, might perhaps fare the worst. We could only rush forward even when the enemy's lance should pierce through the breast. But to show the back and run before the enemies faster than they could do, would be an act which we should yet have to practise in this life for the first time. Unfortunately, the entire brunt of the success would solely and singularly depend upon our continued perseverance in that feat. But it should be somehow managed."

Highly animated were the Princes with his utterance. They swore they would gladly place their heads at the foot of the throne and bowed to Prithwi Singh and Samar Singh. Within an hour, on bounded five thousand and two horses through the grand eastern portals of the metropolis, faster than the swift winged birds.

Canouj was the Queen of cities in Hindusthan with a circumvallation of over thirty miles. The whole town was profusely white-washed and all the roads were kept clean. 'Toruns' of mango leaves were hung at every house and plantain trees tied to the pillars. 'Rangavalli' with pearls and gems was drawn in the vestibules and boards of welcome were hung everywhere. Thousands of banners floated over the proud towers of the Marriage-Hall. The million citizens, male and female, were superbly robed and richly ornamented. The sweetest flowers, treasured in the dark tresses of the ladies, filled the air with fragrance. The great pomps and the unbounded public rejoicings proclaimed as it were the universal marriage of Canouj town and not the marriage of an individual Princess.

The Marriage-Hall stood fifteen feet high from the road and measured one hundred and twenty by thirty yards with a self supporting ceiling. On the raised platform to the west stood the throne and amphitheatrical ranges of seats were arranged on either side for the various Princes and distinguished visitors. Richest carpets were

spread on the floor. The chief entrance into the Hall was to the East. A flight of fifteen semi-circular steps led one to it from the ground. They put up a 'Pandal' adjoining the steps, to accommodate the commander and the guards.

The day dawned. The precincts of the Royal Palace echoed with soft music. A grand procession started, led by Jaichand, the Queen and Samyukta, surrounded by thousands of the choicest ladies of the highest rank. They advanced to the great temple of Bhavani, where they were greeted by the High Priest and conducted into the sanctuary. Hundreds of cocoanuts and other fruits were offered and torches placed in gold plates swung around the shrine. The Princess prayed before the Goddess. The High Priest chanting :—

"The Eastern gate salutes the rising Sun!
The lotus could smile and his love could win!
Adore thy Lord's image - thine he would be!
Oh! daughter! Girija is pleased with thee,"

blessed her, extending his hands. He gave her a cocoanut and a garland of roses. Samyukta presented the Priest with her signet ring. The procession came back to the Palace.

A large number of Princes and distinguished persons had already rushed to the Hall. Every one of them greeted and was greeted by Bhola Bhim, the chief commandant in the Pandal at the gate. The suitors, as they passed through the gate, observed there to their fright, disgust and utter wonderment, an ugly effigy, put up to insult the

mighty Prithwi Singh of Delhi, and when they took their seats, audible were the murmurs of dislike and disaffection. In a few minutes the Hall was packed to the ceiling and grand was the splendour of Royalty. Premchand, the Premier, looked after the arrangements in the Hall.

Bhola Bhim spared no pains to control the tides of population rushing towards the gate from all the adjacent parts. Suddenly there dashed forth a warrior from amidst the uncontrollable mob, leading two steeds with him. "Stop where you are." vociferated Bhola Bhim. The intrepid veteran pressed for immediate admittance. Bhim sternly refused and many a mounted guard advanced to lay their hands upon him. The warrior showed a ring which set a magic seal on Bhola Bhim, who, slightly inclining his head, allowed him to the gate.

The bell rang. Jaichand entered the Hall and took his seat on the throne. The assemblage courteously inclined their heads with respect. Sumathibhattacharya, the bard of Canouj, extended a hearty welcome to all. Sandalwood paste was distributed and the sweetest perfumes were sprinkled. Bouquets and pan - supari were presented. Joy and mirth danced on every face.

The sweet music flowed melodiously. A door in the western wall opened and then entered the Hall Samyukta, followed by a band of her maidens. Cries of "the Queen of Beauty" reverberated through the building. The whole

Assemblage rose and after paying their homage to the supreme Beauty, resumed their seats. Showers of flowers rained for a while!

Samyukta was gracefully tall and her complexion was exceedingly fair. On her polished forehead sat the refulgent marriage coronet! What a halo around her beauteous head! Her rosy cheeks adorned with the small black round touches, usual with the Oriental brides, exhibited an uncommon height of extraordinary beauty. Her lotus eyes were beaming with the highest intelligence and her countenance was superbly attractive. Her ears flamed with the richest diamonds and the valuable rings over her fingers could buy a kingdom. The dark tresses were gathered in a '*Veni*' with the sweetest jasmine flowers along. Her dress was of flowing soft Satin, richly fringed with gold. A gold belt of superior diamonds adorned her waist. Never had another Princely maiden ever looked so beautiful. She was resplendent with Angelic beauty. She held a garland of '*Mandaras*' in her hand and shone like the Moon just released from the clouds.

"Illustrious Princes! and noble gentlemen!" observed the bard "King Jaichand is the proudest ornament of the Rahtore race and is the Lord of thirtysix Royal races. He conquered many a proud Prince and subjugated vast territory. He is the Maharajadhiraj of Northern India and is well versed in music and poetry. Samyukta is his worthy daughter and is the acme of beauty. She

is the embodiment of all virtues and is the personification of superior feminine dignity. She is universally acknowledged as the sweetest flower and the most brilliant Ruby of India. The world could not conceive of another polished maiden endowed with such achievements."

Deafening were the cheers and loud was the applause through the Hall. Sumathi Bhatta-Charya led Samyukta towards the rows of Princes. She was accompanied by the king and two of her maidens. The Princes stood one by one as the party approached. The bard began to introduce to her the first Prince, praising his accomplishments and high station in life in glorious terms. Samyukta stood for a second and moved on. The bard eulogised the Princes in their order but she passed them on. Each Prince at first stood up gushing with hopes but the next instant when she moved on, felt disappointed. At last, the Chieftain of Nepal was the only one left. All thought he was the most fortunate. He himself was not less hopeful and when the Royal maiden approached he stood even inclining his head forward as if to receive the garland. But the heroine overlooked him and stepped forward.

Highly sensational was the suspense that prevailed. The monarch felt enraged. "Whom would you choose?" he roared out in a stern voice. "Revered father!" replied the Princess, "the personage whom I would choose is not yet to be met with." Jaichand commanded that his

ministers, courtiers and other officers of the state should be introduced to her. The bard took her towards the opposite rows of seats and continued his introduction. The Royal maiden did not lift up her head but passed on.

A mingled sentiment of suspense, astonishment and dullness took possession of every heart. "All the energy had been wasted" howled the sovereign of Canouj "and enormous sums of money spent. You have openly disgraced me. You must choose some one here to-day." The terrible chief took the hand of the Princess in a tight grip and dragged her on. Horror-struck and dismayed stood the Assembly and Samyukta herself was on the point of losing her consciousness. "There stands the figure of the meanest of my menials" cried Jaichand in a loud tone, "I command you, on pain of death, to choose this effigy" and he threw her forward. The already tremulous limbs of the tender bride could not withstand his rash push and the next instant she fell on the ground.

Sore affliction was experienced throughout and some Princes of magnanimous disposition had half unsheathed their weapons. The eyes of the warrior at the gate flashed fires but he held himself back with the strongest effort. "Calm yourself, my Lord!" entreated the bard "nothing untoward has taken place here. Resume your Royal seat and yet everything will go well." The King abruptly went towards the dias. Samyukta slowly rose and gazed at the effigy. Hope sprang up in her

countenance. She rushed forward and threw the garland over its neck. Everyone in the great Hall felt bewildered and stupefied at the foolish act of the Princess. The King, chafing like a lion in the cage, jumped down from the throne and pealed forth "Down with the traitress, Arrest her and throw her into the dungeon." The Princess gave a visible start. Perfect silence reigned in the Hall. "Where were we? - and what would come next?" were the questions which troubled every mind.

"Rigid and strict are the rules of Swayamwara." exclaimed the bard. "The proceedings once commenced could never be stopped in the middle nor postponed to another date. The Princess possessed complete option to choose a person, not necessarily a Prince, from among those assembled here. But she had no option to choose one who was not present. She is barred. So, with much regret would I declare aloud the choice made by the Princess illegal and unconventional."

A strong sentiment of sympathy was kindled in all the hearts for the Princess, helpless and forlorn as she now seemed to be and cries of "shame! shame!" were actually heard. "You are entirely mistaken in your calculations and conclusions, bard!" sternly thundered the warrior at the gate. "The Princess selected Prithwi Singh of Delhi and threw the garland round his neck. The great Chohan is present and all the rules of "Swayamwara" are fulfilled and completely

satisfied. I would therefore overrule your wrong and unjust decision and declare with a thundering voice the "Swayamwara" valid and binding in all respects."

Ejaculations of surprise and approval burst forth and all eyes were turned towards the warrior. For the first time Samyukta flung her looks towards him and felt happy that she at last heard one friendly voice at least in that Swayamwara Hall!

"You are under the wrongest notion." responded the bard, in a stentorian voice "An effigy could never answer the purpose now at issue. It could only be a figure, a likeness of some man put up by another, in mockery. An image or a portrait could never be invested with the rights, responsibilities and privileges of the man whom it represented. Prithwi Singh, the original sovereign and man, *is not come*. As such, it should be imperative on me to declare the issue against the Princess. The choice stands null and void."

Samyukta's heart sank within her and most painful was the suspense she felt. Shouts of discontentment, disavowal and disgust arose in the Hall and utter confusion prevailed. "Silence." thundered the warrior, in a highly authoritative tone. "With the most unshakable truth as the Sun shines in the East at this hour, Prithwi Singh *is* present here, in this great Hall, before this great Assemblage, at this very moment, even in this ugly effigy, standing as it is. I say Prithwi Singh *is*

here in flesh and blood to honour and validate the worthy choice of the Royal maiden. The 'Swayamwara' is sound and stands proved in its entire legality and legitimacy."

"No." was the emphatic opposition of the bard. "That could never be! Prithwi Singh is *absent*. My decision stands unaltered and final."

"Stop your prating." vociferated the warrior. "I would tread your decision under my heavy foot. Prithwi Singh *is* here. The whole mass of the Audience, to their joy, could behold him. Keep your own eyes wide open, wily bard!"

A sensation of the wildest astonishment, suspense and amazement prevailed throughout the Hall and complete silence reigned supreme. Samyukta was perplexed with the utmost anxiety. The very next instant the warrior pressed to his lip an enormous conch and the terrible sound rent the atmosphere like the bursting peal of a rolling thunder. All the eyes were turned to and concentrated upon the warrior. The whole Assemblage was about to make a move towards the gate when, all of a sudden, the ugly figure, turning towards the Audience, burst with immense sound from head to foot and to the mad wonderment of all present, Prithwi Singh, the great Chohan Emperor of Delhi, stepped forth like '*Sri Maha Vishnu*' in all the highest magnificence of his stately stature and personal glory, the dense forest of ostrich plumes on the helmet waving and tossing like the mighty waves of the majestic Ocean.

"Illustrious countrymen!" thundered the warrior extending his arms towards him, "behold your Prithwi Singh, the foremost, greatest and noblest Sovereign of the world." He then put a massive gold ornament in his neck and bowed with respect. Universal shouts of "the Emperor! the Emperor!" rang forth through the Hall. The whole Assembly rose and rushed towards the gate in a solid mass. Samyukta felt immense relief and melted in ecstasy and rapture. Before the uncontrollable crowd could recover from the excitement Prithwi Singh mounted the horse. Every one, far and near, had the '*Darsan*' of the great Hero of that most romantic scene and cried out "long live the Emperor!"

"Brother - potentates! and honourable countrymen!" addressed the Jagatpathi "the world knows how king Jaichand insulted me through this hideous effigy, which has now fallen in fragments before you. I dare believe none of you could relish his ungenerous act. I knew Sāmyukta would not choose any body but would wait for me. I was here from the very early hours but I never did aught to divert or disturb the proceedings of this mock 'Swayamwara!' I was all the while silently and obediently discharging my humble duty as Poliah (keeper) of the gate under the express command of the Lord of Canouj. The Princess at last chose me for her bride-groom and thus brought the proceedings to a happy and successful termination. I should be failing in my duty if I

forgot to introduce to you this formidable warrior as no other than my revered preceptor and brahmin guru, the great bard of Delhi, universally known as '*Tricalajna*' Chandra Bhattarakacharya".

A continued uproar of applause resounded through the Hall. "Etiquette required" resumed Prithwi Singh "his Majesty the King of Canouj should have now paid his respects to me as his son-in-law. But as he did not do so, I should deem it fit to bear away the Princess with me according to the '*Rikshasa*' type of marriage. If there were to be any feeling of dissatisfaction harboured in any heart here, it would be needless for the individual to hesitate. The Chohan is ready to cross his weapon at any place and at any hour!"

"You are the bravest warrior in the whole world and you deserve the Princess better than any other" were the loud congratulatory ejaculations that burst forth from every lip. Jaichand was smitten with the wildest rage. He foamed like the Ocean. "Villain!" he roared like a wounded tiger "destruction on you and perdition on your name. I would cut you into pieces." He now rushed through the crowd with a sabre in hand. Samyukta felt dismayed and held out her arms. Prithwi Singh assisted her into the saddle and courteously inclining his plumed head towards the assemblage, put his steed in spurs. Chand accompanied him on his horse.

Soon after the thundering peal from the war shell of the warrior at the gate sounded far and loud, there rushed towards the gate at top speed sixty-four warriors with drawn brands. Arranged in the form of an isosceles triangle with eight cavaliers forming each of the sides and fifteen forming the base, they rode with the apex leading and the base following.

Bhola Bhim was much puzzled at this untimely and unexpected arrival of the veterans. He advanced and from within thirty yards sternly demanded "who comes there?"

"The warriors." was the ready answer of the commander at the vortex. Bhim was utterly bewildered. He pressed the bugle to his lips and at the same time his troopers, rallying round the rows of steps, stood like an impregnable wall.

"Say you warriors!" interrogated Bhim Singh, his face becoming red with rage and his eyes emitting fires "friends or foes?"

"According to circumstances." was the curt response. "Behave better." roared the Prince of Anhulwarah "I command you to stop; otherwise, I should cut you all to pieces."

"The bearer of this ponderous weapon" thundered the leader, lifting his falchion up "is well known to you and to the whole world as the mightiest champion-warrior of the age. Make way! If opposition were to be met with, Bhola Bhim should be the first victim to be torn to pieces!"

Bhim Singh was very much taken with surprise when his name was thus uttered and he stared at the gigantic bulk of the mighty warrior and the amazonian magnitude of the horse under him. "Good God!" he exclaimed as a sudden idea struck him "what! the redoubtable Samar Singh of Mewar! Most unexpectedly met! Gladly would I measure my strength with you." So saying, he attacked the intrepid band with his contingent. But Samar Singh, with a powerful push by his brawny arm, threw him down and carrying his horse before him as a powerful gush of wind should a piece of straw, broke the phalanx.

Just at the same instant, the horse of Prithwi Singh bounded on to the steps. "Troops of Canouj!" commanded Samyukta, grasping the tense situation "hold back and make way." Bhola Bhim who had been quite ignorant of the unexpected turn of the events in the Hall, obeyed her and stepped aside. The heroes of Delhi formed themselves into a strong ring around their Lord and rode fast along the road.

The assemblage in the Hall began to melt away. Jaichand walked to the gate with great effort. "Canouj is badly disgraced." he cried "My worst enemy carried away Samyukta. Chase them. Smite them. Leave them not! Spare me from a miserable death." All were astounded at the dismal news. Hundreds of bugles pressed and thousands of red flags hoisted, in a few moments, brought all the commanders towards the Hall.

Prithwi Singh reached Delhi on the fifth day. Grand and pompous were the preparations and public rejoicings that took place. The wedding was celebrated under the immediate supervision of Maharana Samar Singh of Mewar in all the Asiatic splendour. The Emperor gave gold and silver vessels and valuable cloths to the old priest of Canouj. He also gave him a spacious house to live in and two very rich villages. The Empress Samyukta held him in high respect. In due time the old brahmin brought his family from Canouj and lived a happy life at Delhi.



KOORMA DEVI.

If the moral effect of history depends upon the sympathy and the national elevation, which it excites, undoubtedly the narration of this glorious incident commands the highest admiration.

The principality of Poogal, a distant but important tributary of Jaisalmir, attained the zenith of her glory under the Princes of the Bhatti tribe, one of the most valiant branches of the ancient Yadu race. The name of Ranarang Dev shed a glory over the potentates of the surrounding states and Sadoo was the worthy heir of Poogal. As a lad of sixteen, he carried his raids to the fertile tracts on both the sides of the Indus. The chiefs of Rajanpur and Khaingarh trembled at the mention of his very name! His blue horse often grazed with ease in the luxuriant meadows of Didwar and Palode in the bounds of Marwar. Sadoo was one morning riding through the dense forest of Salbany in search of wild boar when, the heir of the Sankla Maharaj encountered him objecting to his trespassing into his dominions. After an exchange of a few indignant words, the huge body of the heir of Salbany was cut into two by the heavy sword of the young Bhatti. His impregnable fortitude, his intrepid valour, his commanding

talents and his ceaseless capacity, made Sadoo the terror of the desert regions.

The chieftain of Nagaur had just completed his preparations to raid the country on the East, when, abruptly Sadoo fell upon and plundered his capital. With an enormous train of the captured horses and camels, the heir of Poogal was on his way home and encamped one morning in a garden outside Aureent, the capital of Manic Rao, the Chief of the Mohils. It was from the hand of the distinguished ancestors of this proud Rao, the arms of the great Alexander of Macedonia encountered obstinate opposition in his destructive route from Sowrashtra.

Manic Rao sent his ambassador to request Sadoo to partake of his hospitality for the day; and the heir of Poogal gladly accepted the invitation. Followed by Jaitanga, his inseparable lieutenant, he entered Aureent. The chief of the Mohils received him with all friendliness in the magnificent Hall of his great palace.

Sadoo was in his twentieth year, a tall and well-built young man. His complexion was exceedingly fair; his eyes were lustrous and the dark young moustache on his lip worked the masculine excellence of his faultless countenance into perfection. His dress was of flowing white silk. He wore a turban of a beautiful scarlet, characteristic of the Bhatti tribe. A dagger was stuck on his waist-band and the sharp sword adorned his right hand. His bearing was majestic.

The conversation in the dining hall chiefly centred on his valiant deeds. After the sumptuous repast, pan-supari was profusely distributed and a hearty send-off was given to the heir of Poogal in the afternoon.

Koormadevi, the daughter of the Mohil, had just counted sixteen summers. She was fair and exceedingly lovely. The excellence of her darting blue eyes surpassed that of the Queen of flowers. The symmetry of her exquisite nose was unrivalled and her bust was refinedly modelled. The superior eminence of her extraordinary figure could subdue a whole world.

"Dear father!" said Koormadevi one day, approaching her parent, "some time back you asked my opinion on the question of my marriage. I was all the while seriously thinking about this; but could only arrive at a final decision the other day. Permit me to tell you that the young chieftain of Poogal has attracted my regards and my choice goes to him."

"Beloved child!" observed Manic Rao "many were the worthy proposals received from the Princes of the surrounding states for the last many months and though you gave me no definite answer, I took the liberty on myself and selected the Prince of Mundore, as your future husband. He is the ruler of the Rahtores, the bravest of the brave clans in Hindusthan. He is highly cultured and exceedingly affable in manners. I might say you are betrothed to the heir of Mundore."

The chieftain's daughter felt bewildered and confused for a moment. "Revered father!" she resumed "the heir of Poogal has undergone many toils and has accomplished great and reckless deeds. He supplied the richest materials to the pen of the bard and emblazoned his glorious name in his teens. Father! I love him for all the perilous adventures he has undergone. I must, at any cost, try to become the bride of the ordinary heir of Poogal. Sadoo has stolen my heart and without him the world should be a hell to me."

Manic Rao felt uneasy and kept silent for a minute. "Innocent child!" he exclaimed, flinging a look full of concern "The Prince of Mundore is more powerful than all the chieftains of Hindusthan put together. Sadoo himself might not dare to accept your proposal and any false step taken in this matter should plunge the houses of Marwar, Poogal and Aureent into a perpetual strife."

"Father!" added the beautiful damsel, with a composed expression of her countenance "however abundant and attractive might be the resources of Marwar, I could only bear sisterly affection towards its Prince. Sadoo would never reject my love. A magnanimous heart like his could know no disobligation. Even if he were to refuse my hand, I would not be afflicted. His exalted image is enshrined in my heart. I will continue a virgin all my life, ever burning to hear with raptures about his soul-inspiring actions.

Father! the life of the Rajput maiden is always shrouded in danger. My heart is pledged to Sadoo."

"Dearest daughter!" said the Mohil chief, with a glow of tenderness in his face "I love you so much that I cannot think lightly or indifferently of what you say. Your proposal deserves my best attention and deepest earnestness and for worlds, I should not do anything that wounds your tender feelings. My heart is made up and tomorrow at an auspicious hour an embassy will be despatched to Poogal"

"Father!" ejaculated the Princess with a feeling of immense relief "I am under an eternal debt of gratitude to you." She bowed and went in.

The next day, Manic Rao despatched an ambassador with the cocoanut in form, to Poogal. Ranarang Dev was seated in his chair of state with the vassals attending on him. The envoy presented the co-co. The honourable custom of the Rajput requires the cocoanut, adorned with diamonds all over and brought in a gold plate, to be ushered gently at the feet of the head of the house to which it is intended. This custom, mute though it would seem, is stronger than the emphatic and eloquent avowal that the daughter of the house from which the co-co comes is intended to be given to the house to which it was brought. Ranarang gladly accepted the gage and dismissed the embassy with valuable gifts.

The marriage was celebrated with great pomp at Aureent and the nuptials were solemnized in due time. Manic Rao presented a splendid dower of gems of high price, vessels of gold and silver, necklaces of pearls, besides a number of elephants and horses. A group of dewadharies, beautiful damsels of wisdom and penetration, accompanied Koormadevi.

Manic Rao urged his son-in-law to allow four thousand of his brave Mohils, under his son, Meghraj, to escort him to Poogal. Sadoo declined with a smile observing that he had with him seven hundred Bhattis, brave and irresistible, each of whom able to crush an entire army. Meghraj entreated to accept at least half the number. Sadoo could not disoblige and accepted only fifty warriors.

Koormadevi and her damsels seated themselves in the car while, Sadoo mounted his blue steed and Meghraj accompanied him on an Arab. The whole party left Aureent and the next morning encamped under a grove of trees on a vast plain near Chandan. A delicious repast was enjoyed and Sadoo was just reclining on his couch under the cool shade of a big mango tree, when, he suddenly heard the sound of heavy foot steps approaching him. The intruder was no other than Maharaj Sankla whose son Sadoo had killed in the excursion at Salbany. The heir of Poogal opened his eyes and at once sat up, his hand instantaneously grasping the handle of his brand.

The Sankla shuddered to the core of his frame when he approached him.

"I recognise you as the chieftain of Salbany," observed Sadoo "I presume you have come here to try your hand with me."

"Brave Prince!" replied Maharaj, in a submissive tone "I am the humble chieftain of Salbany. Aranyakamala, the Prince of Marwar, has encamped nearby with four thousand of his Rahtore warriors and desired me to intimate to you his intentions. He, however, scorns the advantage of numbers and prefers with your kind approval, single combats with all the forms of the strictest chivalry.

"I congratulate the brave Rahtore" exclaimed Sadoo, with a noble dignity of countenance. "The heir of Poogal will always be ready to draw his sword with his antagonist. But, ask your Prince to come after an hour, in the mean-time I would have my usual seista."

"I will duly carry your injunctions," replied the chief of Salbany and departed.

After the appointed time, the Rahtores and the Bhatties rushed to the field and various single combats ensued. The Rahtores, clad in black armour, poured forth like the clouds of Bhadoon and the air resounded with the war-shell and the war-cry of the Bhatti. Jaitanga, of the Pahoo clan, challenged the enemy to the fight. Maharaj rushed forth from the opposite ranks like a huge elephant. But, when he approached the lion-like

Pahoo, his hand shook and the Sankla shrank back. Aranyakamala, appreciating the admirable address with which the Pahoo guided his steed, asked his commander, Jodha Singh, to combat with him. The brave Chohan advanced against Jaitanga with the fury of a loosened tiger. The swords clashed and terrible were the blows they exchanged. The heavy sword of the Chohan fell direct on the head of Jaitanga but the stern stalwart warrior dexterously averted it with a push from his powerful arm and penetrated his spear through the breast of his antagonist. The gigantic Chohan fell a corpse to the ground. The Rahtores pressed on with awful fury but the valorous Bhattis stood firm and irresistible like the Pole star. Death danced on the ends of their lances. Six hundred Rahtore warriors were levelled to the ground while, half of the Bhatti train were cut to pieces.

Sadoo mounted his steed and tremendous was the applause from the maidens in the car. Nobody could tell how many times he charged the rival ranks carrying destruction into their midst. Streams of blood flowed copiously in the field.

The Prince of Marwar was seen advancing to the front. Koormadevi jumped down from the car and exhorted her Lord to fight to victory or death and further gave vent to her heroic feelings that death was the destiny not only of man but of Gods also, she would witness his brave deeds and if he fell, she would embrace him in the other

world! Sadoo bade a last adieu to his beloved bride; spurred his blue steed and met the Rahtore.

"Brave Prince!" observed Aranyakamala, in a tone full of courtesy "allow me to express before we cross weapons, that no base sentiment of revenge towards you lurks in my heart. The recent marriage at Aurcent had plucked away a bright rose from my proud crest. To wipe off the disgrace around my fair name, I just wanted to seek a duel with you. I feel quite grateful to you for your immediate response. But, it immensely pains me to cause bloodshed. Let us begin. Take the lead."

"Your bearing is as dignified as your fair name," exclaimed Sadoo, slightly inclining his head in acknowledgment of his noble compliment. "A more honourable rival could scarcely be found. Prince of the Rahtores! you are amply justified in seeking a duel with me. But sorry, I will not bring discredit to the ever-untarnished house of Poogal by opening the duel. I give the advantage of the first blow to your honourable hand."

"Dignified Prince!" added Aranyakamala "you are highly chivalrous. The bravest are falling around us. Refuse not to begin the combat simultaneously at least."

"Good Prince!" replied Sadoo "I quite appreciate your chivalrous philosophy."

Both withdrew and with indescribable impetuosity rushed on each other. A deadly conflict ensued and they fought like two fierce

lions. The sharp swords embraced their necks as though they were mere flower garlands! Each strained his nerve to overthrow the other. The noble steeds seconded their lords no less amply. Sadoo at length dealt out a heavy blow on the neck of the Rahtore, which was instantaneously returned and the hard steel of his rival descended deep on the head of the Bhatti. Both the heroes fell to the ground. The Rahtore warriors bore the body of their Prince to his tent. But, the last divine glow from the body of the gallant Sadoo had faded away! With the fall of the leaders, the battle subsided.

The lovely heroine, Koormadevi, at once, a virgin, a bride and a widow performed her ablutions and made the 'tilak' on the forehead with earth from the stream hardby. She wore the gayest garments and richest ornaments. "Beloved brother!" she addressed Meghraj "convey my highest regards to our revered father who brought me up with the utmost tenderness of affection. I have lived like 'Indrani' nursed in softness amidst the buds and flowers. The illustrious Sadoo was the Lord of my heart here and will continue to be my heaven hereafter! Without him life is death. I can easily abandon the whole world but my husband. May our renowned Mohil race be blessed! Let me accompany my Lord to the world of eternal bliss, the Sooryaloka." She took leave of her brother and went to Sadoo! She touched his feet with the profoundest reverence and applied

the hands to her eyes. She stood and gave a fervent prayer to Hari to accept her fidelity to her Lord. She mounted the pyre. With the sword of her husband she dis severed her left arm and handing it over to the dewadharies, commanded them to take it to the father of her husband and tell him that such was his daughter-in-law. She then removed all the jewels on her person and gave them to her brother asking him to present them to her family purohit and preceptor at Aureent. She then took the body of her beloved Lord into her embrace, plunged into the devouring flames and thus closed her short but immemorable life!

The beautiful arm of the heroine was taken to Poogal and presented to Ranarang Dev, who, in due time, arranged a pyre of sandal wood and caused the arm, burnt. He had, an extensive tank excavated on the spot with a big choultry built on the mound. It is still called after her,

“The Grand Koormadevi Lake.”



KRISHNA KUMARI.

Maharana Bhim Singh was on the throne of Udaipur in the early part of the nineteenth century and ruled Mewar for many years. Krishna Kumari was the fruit of his marriage with the Princess of the Chawura race of the ancient Anhulwarah. Krishna attained her age. The world was filled with the fame of her superlative beauty and she was called the flower of Aryavarta. Many were the Royal suitors that thronged from the surrounding states to possess the hand of the beauteous Princess.

The Rana, after due deliberation, accepted the proposal of Jagath Singh of Jaipur, the descendant of the Great Raja Man of Amber, the most conspicuous of the commanders of the great Mogul, Akber. Grand and sumptuous were the preparations that were made for the celebration of the marriage at Udaipur. Subsequently, Man Singh of Marwar advanced his claims for the Royal maiden and vowed irresistible opposition if he were not honoured.

The rapacious Mahrattas, had, for some time past, acquired considerable sway over all the principalities of Northern India, including Mewar. Bapuji Sindhia, the veteran lieutenant of the Peshwa, shared no love with Jagath Singh, who refused to pay him a war contribution the previous

year. Man Singh supplied him with large sums of money. Consequently, Bapuji opposed the marriage of Jagath Singh and took sides with Man Singh. He even demanded the Rana to send word to Jaipur not to proceed to Udaipur. Bhim Singh refused and was determined to stick up to his promise.

The Jaipur cortege, accompanied by three thousand Cutchwaha cavaliers, entered Mewar and advanced up to within ten miles of Udaipur. The Maharana sent Ajit Singh, the Chondawut Premier, with five thousand Sesodias, to escort the party to the capital. The Premier met and greeted Jagath Singh. They then advanced and approached the pass of Debarree where, they were attacked by Sindhia at the head of an enormous army, equipped with numerous field artillery. A most sanguinary battle ensued. The Mahratta batteries did dreadful havoc in the ranks of Jaipur. The war-like Cutchwahas sprang forth like fierce tigers and severed down the heads of the enemy in great numbers. The Sesodia contingents were eager to put their valour to the test by attacking the blood-thirsty Mahrattas. But Ajit wavered and led them not. When the battle was still in the fiercest, Sindhia advanced to where the Mewar squadrons stood. The Sesodia regiments gave way without opposing him and Sindhia made good his way to Udaipur. Jagath Singh retreated to Amber. Ajit Singh came back to the capital and told the sad tale to his Royal Master. The

Mahratta chieftain remained in the valley for a month, at the close of which, an interview was sought and arranged between him and the Maharana at the shrine of Eklinga on the Mount Aboo.

The metallic tongue of the clock proclaimed the hour of appointment. Bapuji, accompanied by the British envoy who was with him, entered the great temple. Prince Umra (the heir-apparent) conducted him into the Royal presence. The Rana was seated on the high-cushioned throne. Prince Juvan Singh occupied a seat to his left. Bhim Singh, though advanced in years, maintained all the vigour of early manhood. His demeanour was dignified and stately. Umra and Juvan Singh were bordering on twenty. Their countenances were beaming with the distinct grandeur expressive of their high extraction.

Sindhia had just counted thirty. He was of middle stature. Although he exercised an uninterrupted sway over all the potentates of Hindusthan as a dictator, he was slow to enter the 'Hall of the Cæsars' and less bold to occupy a seat in front of the august sovereign Prince of the most exalted Solar descent.

The British envoy was a tall well-looking young man of five and twenty, clad in military apparel. His countenance was bright with the freshness of sincerity and artless simplicity. After the usual military salutation, he took his seat along with the Mahratta chieftain.

"May it please your Highness!" said Sindhia. "to accept my profound respects. I crave your Highness's pardon if I touch the topic of the marriage and solicit the leniency of discussing in detail."

"No excuse need be offered" observed the Rana "as the question must, one day, be settled and you are at liberty to deal with it forthwith."

"Permit me in the first place" rejoined Sindhia "to represent that Jagath Singh of Jaipur is far from enjoying any friendly inclinations either from me or from the Mahratta nation in general. I am derected by my superior chief, the Peshwa, to espouse the cause of Man Singh of Marwar. I would, therefore, without further delay, beseech your Highness to view the affair with the deepest consideration and decide in a way becoming the dignity of your Highness which, I uphold, bound as I am in duty."

"Your generosity deserves thanks" replied the Rana "I would give due weight to your principal's intentions and every consideration to your own suggestions. But the question of my daughter's marriage was long under our consideration and it was only after mature deliberation that my promise was made to Jagath Singh. You know, I belong to a house, whose honour is widely acknowledged through the land. Even in the present degenerated state of my principality, I, for all the perils that might overtake me, would endeavour to enhance the

great name of my house. I might point out that it would be unjust to decide matrimonial matters with the sword. I pledged my word as a sovereign, as a father and as a Rajput. And you, as a Hindu, could comprehend the magnitude of the intricate situation. I need say no more."

"Prince of the Sesodias!" continued Sindhia "I could grasp the utmost solemnity of the question and the most irksome position in which your Highness is placed. But there are grave matters materially influencing the circumstances of the present day that require our utmost caution and precise promptness. Let me not be considered rude, if I dare to suggest, that, to avoid all rivalry and unpleasantness, your Highness might overlook the claims of both the rival suitors and bestow the hand of the worthy Princess upon another, decidedly more powerful and deserving."

An expression of slight indignation took possession of the otherwise calm and serene countenance of the Rana and he was about to reject the advice, when, in an instant, wheeling round the chair towards the Mahratta chieftain, "My Lord!" exclaimed the British envoy "the question of marriage among Hindus is an act sacred in itself. His Highness, the Dewanji is the most exalted among the Princes of Hindusthan. The solemn promise of this revered sovereign is both sacred and divine. I might be permitted to observe that you, as a chieftain and co-Hindu, are bound, in every way, to uphold his promise.

I would, therefore, urge your Lordship to waive the futile cause you have advocated for Man Singh and put a stop to the topic, painful as it is."

The unexpected delivery of the noble Scotchman, short though it was, created a pleasant impression upon the minds of the Royal individuals. On Sindhia, it produced a marvellous effect, who, for various reasons, could not but respect the advice. "With due regard for the worthy utterance of my honourable friend," exclaimed the Mahratta chieftain, in a tone at once courteous and conciliating "I should feel it my duty to leave your Highness's pious decisions undisturbed. Pray, pardon this rude intrusion on my part."

"Offer no excuse" observed the Rana, with stately dignity. Sindhia rose from his seat and bowed. The foreign envoy, raising himself and inclining his head in token of profound respect, submitted "Worthy descendant of a thousand kings! I would deem myself exalted to have enjoyed the august presence of the sovereign monarch of India. I am an ordinary officer in the British military service. If God be pleased to promote my rank and increase my influence, I would and should strive to serve and uplift Mewar, the most cherished land of my heart, of which, your Highness is the proudest and the worthiest ornament. I pray, God grant me the gratification of being instrumental in raising your beloved country to its highest prosperity. "May that day soon arrive!" this is

the burning desire of your Highness's humble admirer." The Rana was pleased and expressed his thankfulness. The two guests walked to the grand entrance of the temple, accompanied by the heralds of the Rajput.

The dishonoured Jagath Singh invaded Marwar and Man Singh encountered him at the head of an enormous army. Sword and lance accomplished awful work and heavy was the cannonading on either side. Every clan lost great numbers. Jagath Singh was unrelenting in offering everything to the sword. The Rahtore clans, thrown in confusion, were pursued to the capital. Jodhpur, however, laughed a siege and Jagath Singh had to abandon the enterprise. He was badly attacked on his way and with a great difficulty reached Jaipur dismembered and humbled.

The last curtain to this painful drama could not, as yet, be dropped at the eventful stage. Man Singh corresponded with the Holkar, who sent Nawab Ameer Khan, the controller of his Regulars, to assist him. The Pathan advanced to Udaipur and despatched an ultimatum specifying that the Rana should either wed his daughter to Man Singh, or should, through her death, close the troublesome chapter.

The ministers were summoned and consulted. One of the counsellors expressed that he should rather attack the Khan in the open field than to submit to his conditions. The Maharana painfully

suggested to leave Krishna, a virgin all her life. But, Ajit Singh, the Premier, feared the dangerous consequences that should follow envisaging that the Khan should storm the City, that endless massacre might ensue, that females should be molested, that recourse to the fatal '*Johar*' should have to be taken, that plunder and pillage should follow and he therefore urged that the sacrifice of the maiden, however innocent she might be, should take place! After a lengthy and heated discussion, the fiat passed that Krishna Kumari must die.

 Ghastly pale and utterly bloodless turned his face, which the Rana buried in his hands and sank in his chair. As Ajit was bent upon doing the deed, he approached and sounded Maharaja Doulat Singh, a distant brother of the Rana. A gush of indignation flamed up in a moment from the depths of his heart and the Royal relation vociferated "Wretch! as you are! how dare you approach me with this fiendish design! I would sooner cut my right hand than lift the sword against the innocent child. May your tongue crack into a thousand fragments! I would cut you in twain." The broad sword flashed forth from its sheath like lightning.

 Ajit Singh, without uttering another syllable, stole himself off. He made his way to Juvandas, a natural brother of the Rana and intimated the dire necessity to him. He accepted the commission and traversing the labyrinth of apartments found himself in the magnificent inner

Hall, which the lovely maiden entered from the opposite direction.

Krishna Kumari was a tall and wholesome maiden of grand and striking beauty. Her superb face was more fascinating than the full Moon and the sunny smiles of sixteen summers bathed in that bewitchingly beautiful fount. Her large dark eyes were dazzling with the extraordinary brilliance. Her damask cheeks were rosy and glowing. Her ears blazed with the richest diamond rings and the magnificence of her enviable beauty required not another artificial jewel. She was the richest ornament of all ornaments. It should be impossible to conceive a maiden more endowed and more captivating. Poor child! knows not what fate awaits her!

Juvandas advanced with a poniard in hand. The enchantress walked towards him with the splendid dignity of the stately swan and accosted him. He stood remorse-stricken. The blade fell from his hand and when Krishna asked what perplexed him thus, he felt ashamed and disgraced. Without offering a word in reply, he, with immense effort, carried himself to the Audience Hall, more wretched and more humiliated.

Krishna was excused the steel but she had to meet with her bitterer destiny. A cup was prepared and presented, the boisterous liquid effusing venomous vapours. The raving wild shrieks of the frantic mother pealed forth and the

next moment, she rushed into the Hall and clasped her child in her arms.

But Krishna had exhausted the burning contents of the cup. She exclaimed with the usual air of imperturbability "it is for such sacrifices that the Rajput maidens are marked out and singled out. There is sweetness and sacredness in sacrifice. Beloved mother! do not afflict yourself on my behalf. Sprung up as I do, from your noblest blood, I should know no fear. You described to me in my younger days, how the virtuous Padmini, accompanied by hundreds of her sex, embraced the devouring flames. Fresh is my mind with the memory of how the magnanimous Karnavati, the worthy grandmother of the mighty patriot Prince Pratap, conducted thirteen thousand of her choicest ladies and committed '*Johar*' during the memorable siege of Chittore. Good mother! you are very kind to me. I adore you and bow to you." She touched the feet of her mother, who, the next instant, fell down, giving vent to a bitter moan.

Krishna sat in her stately chair with the sweetest smile. A quarter of an hour passed. The fatal draught refused to assimilate with her blood. A more powerful cup was prepared and presented for the second time. The heroic maiden evacuated the nauseating contents as though she would, a delicious drink. This time too, the poisonous potion did not produce the desired effect.

A third draught was prepared. Strong juice was extracted from venomous herbs and flowers and a powerful opiate was introduced into it. Krishna advanced with a stately step, took the cup and emptied the Kusoomba draught. Turning her handsome face upwards, she exclaimed "May God grant me sublime repose at least now!" After a few minutes, she sank in the chair and slept a sleep from which she never woke up.

The unfortunate mother could touch neither food nor water. Her frame was exhausted in the ravings of utter despair. She could know neither sleep nor rest. She could not long survive her darling.

Sangram Singh, whose name was held in high estimation, returned to the capital from Seogarh, his new abode, only four days after the catastrophe. He could treat the frown of his monarch and the falchion of his foe with equal contempt. He was an ideal hero representing all the chivalrous distinction of his noble breed and high pedigree. He dashed into the Royal presence where, he found, Ajit Singh seated.

With a sudden impetuosity of passion he poured forth a volley of abuse and thundered "Darkest traitor! is it thus you dared to plunge the renowned Sesodia house into dishonour! Detestable perpetrator of the foulest crime! you have filled the cup of horrors to the very brim! All your villainy and horrible guilt, I know. Is it not damning that you, who enjoy high and honourable

estates in Saloombra, should receive bribes from Man Singh? Ungracious wretch! is it thus the devoted Sahidas obtained the world renown, who shed his blood and sinews at the gate of the Sun during the memorable siege of Chittore? Is it thus the great Saloombra Krishna Singh, who drew upon him the brunt of his master's toils and afflictions, served the patriot Pratap for over a quarter of a century and maintained the Rajput national independence! You have thrown into the deepest recesses of the hell the inestimable devotion of your ancestors, whose blood flowed in torrents and moistened every inch of the battle field. Villain! who so unscrupulously made use of your arguments to put an end to the fresh and full life of Krishna Kumari, the utterance of whose sacred name could thrill the entire frames of the hearers into ecstasy. But for the presence of this revered sovereign, I would have, this moment, trampled you under my heavy foot as I would an insignificant worm! Detested dastard! dust on your head! and annihilation on your progeny."

The stalwart Sooktawut, after a pause of a second or two, turned to the Rana and indignantly admonished, "Old and experienced as you are, Diwanji! you proved to be a stain on the long list of the Sesodia Princes, whose fair name is ever remembered with reverence throughout the world. The foul crime, you have allowed to be committed, is a veritable signal for the destruction of your great House! What! had the expansive skies fallen upon

you in great heaps! Had all the Oceans bulged out and pressed on your head with all the magnitude of the great weight of their mighty waters! Had the mother Earth quaked and gone down under your feet! Or had the Deluge over-taken, sweeping everything noble and sacred from you! The Pathan had not stormed the city! The sanctity of the lady folk is not threatened! Why this disgraceful hurry! Was it thus your great ancestors Samar Singh and his intrepid son Kalyan Singh, a tender lad of twelve, the mighty waves of iron in the path of Delhi's foes, carried destruction into the midst of hundreds of thousands of the brave warriors of Canouj and Ghor and laid their lives at the feet of the altar of the Indian national Liberty! Was it through such effeminate deeds, the formidable Pratap and his champion son Amar Singh arrayed their scanty but intrepid bands of veterans against the multitudinous armies of the proudest Mogul emperors of their day! The heroic Padmini, the undaunted Jawahari Bai and the adorable Karnavati have immortalised their glorious names through their uncompromising valour and unlimited sacrifice. Even the humblest maid-servants of the lowest rank in your great House had accomplished exemplary deeds and emblazoned the top most pages in the history of the world. Srijit! you have cruelly immersed the world's most illustrious House into the Ocean of degradation. You have bitterly wronged us all. This would not do."

The eyes of the warrior flashed fire. He unsheathed his falchion and would have torn the traitor into one-thousand-and-one pieces had not the Rana's hand come between. The traitor abruptly took himself off and the noble Sangram had to sheathe his snake-like instrument.

Ajit Singh was banished. He lost his wife and two sons. He wandered from place to place living on alms and at the close of the twelfth month the burning ghat at Benares consumed the sinful remains of the vile murderer, which all the sacred waters of the celestial Ganges could not possibly purify.

JOSHI BAI.

It was the most pleasant evening of the ninth day of the first month of the Persian year, corresponding to 1582. The sky was azure and bright. The entire bulk of the Mogul metropolis, with her lofty towers, formidable ramparts, stately palaces and high pyramidal pinnacles of the magnificent temples and great mosques, exhibited the fascinating aspect of the mighty lake with the roseate rays of the bright Sun shedding their extravagant flood of glorious light over the multitude of lotuses on its bosom.

The water clock of the Mogul court announced the hour of five and the thrilling notes of the state military band reverberated through the soft evening air. Crowds of women, of common classes, had already thronged around the palace gardens eager to secure favourable situations and accommodations for viewing the interesting fair on the 'Kushroj', the day of pleasure. Respectable ladies of the commanders, the nobles and the vassal chieftains, accompanied by groups of maid servants, emerged in large numbers from all directions in the great city, in splendid draw-carts, coaches and palanquins. Increasing in their bulks, they advanced to where streets crossed and the illimitable tides of the fair sex passed through the various gates of the four

score underground apartments and reached the show gardens. Animated were the greetings which the ladies exchanged and fervid were the old acquaintances they renewed on this memorable evening of the Gala day.

A magnificent gallery was arranged in the centre. On a raised cushioned dias sat the stately Jodha Bai, the Rahtore Queen of Akbar, attended by the retinue of her maids. The worthy lady of the Khankhanan, the Princesses of Amber, Marwar, Jaisalmir, Bikaner, Boondi, Ajmir, Kotah, and Kishengarh occupied seats to the right. The fair of the Royal houses of Malwa, Gujarat, Chouragarh, Hosangabad, Khandesh and Bengal adorned the rich seats to the left. The proud ladies of the nobles and the commanders, both foreign and home, filled the remaining seats. The Royal gardens were teeming with feminine charms! No man had access to the arena except on pain of death.

The central ground had been apportioned into many streets and bazaars, with shops of every kind. The entire extent was profusely illuminated and purchases were already in progress. Manufactures of every clime were exposed by the ladies of the merchants. Merchandise of all descriptions and magnitudes flew at a rapid rate and gold filled the boxes of the shop-keepers. Some of the distinguished ladies of the noblemen alighted from their high seats and went to the shops to make purchases. Some were

returning towards the gallery with the articles they purchased.

It was dusk. A distinguished lady issued forth from the palace apartments. She was of medium stature and appeared to have seen two and-thirty summers. Her form was strong and stately. Her eyes were dark and lustrous. Her complexion was fair and her lips red and well-shaped. The black big mole in the fine forehead added singular beauty to her countenance and the glory of her handsome person denoted the high distinction of her illustrious extraction.

She was slow in her pace and advanced to the 'Meena' bazaar with stately dignity. No shop—no article attracted her gracious look and strange it was that she neither accosted any one nor was accosted by any one from amongst the nearly half a million of fair faces. However, she very soon occupied herself in taking a rapid sketch of the entire view thus!—"The beautiful section of the female population indeed far superior in degree to any congregated on previous occasions! Ah! this world of beaming Moons! This Ocean of Elegance! This lake of stately Swans! This garden of the sweetest Roses! This heaven of Angels! This gathering of Goddesses! This temple of adroable Idols! This galaxy of the world's best Beauties! How unrivalled and incomparable! There is not a single fair figure here that does not possess her own special dominating attraction! The first object, worthy

of appreciation, is Padma Bai, the Rahtore Princess of Marwar. Then comes the lady of Jaisalmir, endowed with remarkable charms! The haughty beauty of Bikaner is not less enchanting! The blooming damsel of Kishengarh is exceedingly superb! There rears her head the tall and faultless lily of the lake of Mewar, the amiable Joshi Bai and dazzling to the eye is the matchless Mehrl, the dignified maiden of Malwa!"

The unknown lady here paused for a minute and resumed, "Among the half a dozen exalted beauties, the familiar Bikaner Jodha Bai might be advantageously left for herself. The magnetic worthy of Malwa might be conveniently reserved for a future occasion. The Marwar Princess might be left undisturbed. The desert beauty might leisurely be taken up. The captivating dame of Kishengarh is effulgent in her best graces. But oh! marvellously attractive is the radiant star of Mewar. It would be deadly difficult to decide the Queen of beauty this memorable evening."

She gazed with the most eager look at one face now and at another afterwards and mused and murmured within herself, "There is much really grand and imposing in the features of the Sesodia maiden. Her complexion is exceedingly fair. Her eyes are resplendent with the finest lustre. Her countenance is dominant with the glowing elegance. The wealth of her luxuriant dark tresses is inestimable. The fitting proportions of her handsome bust are highly enchanting. The

mellow sounds of her sweet voice could conquer a whole world. She is really the embodiment of the highest perfection of beauty. She has rightly monopolised the place of the Queen of beauty of the day."

The fair was drawing to a close. The several cushioned seats in the gallery speedily began to receive, the richly appavelled and dignified ladies, their distinguished occupants. A few minutes after, the resounding peals of the trumpets, under the signal from the Marshals, proclaimed aloud the termination of the festivities. Myriads of females suddenly began to move and rush to the subterranean apartments. The ladies of rank were the last to seek egress. Joshi Bai advanced to the particular apartment which she was wont to traverse on such occasions. She entered the first, passed through the next and reached the third apartment, when, our unknown visitor accosted her courteously. The Sesodia maiden returned the salutation.

"May it please, your ladyship!" observed the visitor "to rest yourself and accept the humble hospitality. You would be well cared for and would not be detained beyond a few minutes."

"I thank you, said the amiable Princess "for your courtesy. But I am afraid the hour is already late and I would not tarry here any longer. Any how, I would not disoblige you."

"Immensely am I pleased" rejoined the hostess and conducted her, with the utmost respect,

to the table groaning under the weight of delicious refreshments. The sweetest scents were sprinkled on her. The richest cloths, valuable ornaments and precious diamonds were displayed. They reached the angle of the Hall where, many beautiful pictures were hung up and then "Prodigy of beauty!" observed the conductress "behold, how the illustrious Rukmangada kneels before Mohini and whispers his love tale! Observe, the formidable sage Visvamitra soliciting the hand of Menaka with all the burning fervour of the deepest love! There, you would sympathise with the lovelorn Damayanti, passionately appealing to her Lord Nala, to accept her as his bride! See, how the bashful Subhadra disengages her beauteous hand from the hold of Arjun! There, see how the celestial Varudhini is making her love gestures to Pravara! You should melt to behold the bewitching Tara shedding the luminous glory of her magnificent dark eyes over her cherished lover, the refulgent Chandra and begging to grant her one embrace! Yes, these are really scenes which could appeal to beautiful ladies like you and drive into ecstasy and raptures." She flung a look of passionate admiration upon the face of the fair Princess and awaited her favourable reply.

"You are taking unnecessary trouble" interrupted Joshi Bai "to eulogise these things to me. I might point out, without restraint, that the trend which you are pursuing, does not become the high dignity you profess." The Princess looked at the door and turned her steps.

"Kindly permit me, gracious lady!" pleaded the wily conductress, hurriedly interposing herself, in a tone of the deepest and tenderest earnestness "to lead you into the yonder boudoir. You are the loveliest blossom in the luxuriant garden of Hindusthan. You are the idol of my heart. I would adore and worship you." She now actually went down upon her knees. The bright lights in the spacious Hall became dull and dim. With bubbling indignation, for the first time, the Princess looked more scrutinisingly and more penetratingly into the singular countenance of the unknown dame. She gave a start as a strange idea suddenly struck her mind—her worst suspicions were confirmed."

Arming herself with the most dignified fortitude "Good heavens! what do I see here!" interjected the resplendent beauty. "It is you that I behold thus before me. Long would you have been perpetrating the foulest and the most shameful crime against the weaker and less courageous sex of mine. These ninth-day-fairs of 'Noroza' which you openly professed were intended for the benefit and uplift of mankind, have undoubtedly turned out to be the slaughter houses of the chastities of the noblest Rajput ladies. Your ungenerous passion to spoil the honour of the virtuous ladies of those, whom the chance of war had made your vassals, is simply nefarious and repugnant. Would you, the guardian of mankind,

thus venture to devour the richest and the most sacred treasure God has placed in your custody! Yet, you boast you abolished the horrible 'Sati'; that you set aside the law of slavery; the levy of Poll Tax and the Pilgrim Tax!; you boast that you worship the cow and the Sun. Know you not that women, as a sex, are sacred and divine? They are softer and tenderer than the hard sex. The first and foremost duty of the man is to preserve the dignity and honour the chastity, not only of the women of his house and his nation, but also of women of all houses and of all nations. Exalted is the country where females are respected and worshipped as great heroines. He, that stealthily and viciously does aught to lower the sublimity of the softer sex, is a detestable traitor to the country that gave him birth and a traitor to God, That created him. Even your sisters and daughters, if this your fiendish design is known to them, would suspect and abandon your presence as though it were the presence of a dreadful Hydra. Is it not degrading that you, who, with eagle eyes, ought to protect the interests of millions of Hindus and Musalmans, Parsis and Christians, Jains and Buddhists, should, most infamously, drag innocent women into the subterranean cells of pollution in the dead of night and threaten them to submit to your detestable passion? Take care at least now. Otherwise, the world would not hold you."

The heroic lady drew herself one step back and her stature appeared terrible and awe-

inspiring. "Enravishing beauty!" entreated the suppliant person" I beseech you not to indulge in harsh language. Your Angelic beauty has captivated me. Painfully would I urge you to honour my bed. I love you more than any human language could possibly express." Still, the tenderly famishing regards of the conductress were drinking in the gracefulness over the face of the Princess with unquenched fervour.

"Villain!" vociferated the high-born damsel, at once drawing forth the dagger from her corset "it is my fidelity to your great name that spares your life now. Advance but a single inch towards me, my poniard should plunge six inches deep into your breast! Dare you to consume a volume of forest fire! Try you to appease your hunger by devouring a thunderbolt! Beware, how you thrust your head into the terrible jaws of Yama, the mighty controller of Death! Prostrate before me and swear that you should never design any evil things against my sex! Then, I shall consider to spare your life or, if you persist, I should tear you into one-thousand-and-one fragments! With the most unpardonable grossness, you have, to-day, insulted, through me, the world's highest and the proudest House of Mewar. Thank God! My revered parent, the paramount patriot-Prince, Pratap, through his unbounded mercy, had spared your kingdom and your life to create a chance for my valorous hand! Decide your fate."

The chivalrous Princess stood erect, shining in all her dignified heroism. Most unexpected and most disastrous was the shock of the disappointment - stroke! With immense effort, regaining his self possession and raising himself "Worthy sister! and benevolent Princess!" submitted the person, in a tone humble and full of remorse, the tears of the deepest shame running down the smooth cheeks "the female costume, which now I wear, is, in itself, a mark of decided degradation into which I have sunk myself! You have heavily charged and overwhelmed me with shame and confusion. Never had I expected to be trodden like this. I admit there is always dishonour in defeat. But, this is a defeat which I would wish for. You have taught me a worthy lesson and saved me from danger. Henceforward I would always adore you as my worthy saviour. I would certainly take the oath which you ere now solemnly proposed. I kneel before you for the second time (suited the action to the word) but with a truer and purer heart and in the name of the Almighty, in the name of the Sun, the Moon and the Stars, in the name of the vast Universe and in the name of all the Elements, sacred and worthy, I swear, that in future, I will never molest any woman with unholy sentiment. I would entreat you, magnanimous lady!, with the deepest earnestness, to spare my honour! Pray, breathe not a syllable about this repugnant incident to a third man. I adore your

unimpeachable virtue and remain ever your grateful admirer."

Joshi Bai viewed her Royal fugitive with mercy and forgiveness. The Great Akbar stood before her, humiliated. "Impose not any conditions and restrictions upon me." admonished the Princess. "A virtuous wife would never hide anything from her husband. The very instant I step at the front door of my mansion, I would certainly unbosom everthing to my beloved lord, Prithwi Raj, the poet laureate. If you, in future, renew your degrading transactions, then, woe be to you and to your life—and all the worlds might never save you from the most wretched degradation. I will then rush to the platform and proclaim, in a thundering voice, your blackest deeds to the world from East to West. But enough for the present!"

"I owe you, then" ejaculated the Emperor "my honour! Thanks! tarry for a second. I would depute my maid-servants to escort you to your distant residence. I must not see you walk alone in the darkness at this late hour." He was about to rush to the door.

"Trouble not yourself." observed the heroine "There is not another to molest me. I am a stranger to the sentiment of fear. Remember a lady, who could withstand the attack of the mightiest Padusha, will fear nothing in this world,"

"Aptly true" exclaimed the Great Akbar, gracefully inclining his head by way of respect. Joshi Bai walked away with a calm and dignified step. Very soon the merry ejaculations of the magnanimous Prithwi Raj, coupled with the ringing platitudes of the virtuous Mewari, reverberated in the inner Hall of their beautiful abode!

Could Akbar hear?



VEERAMATI.



Udayaditya Pramara was one of the celebrated Princes of Dhar in the eleventh century and was a worthy descendant of Bhoj, whose name will be remembered as long as even a fragment of Sanskrit literature remains. He took the most prominent part in the grand confederacy of the Rajput Princes led against the Islamite king, Modud. His sway extended over Malwa, Chedi and Sourashtra.

He had two sons Ranadhawal, by his Queen the Baghela Princess and Jagadev, by his junior Rani the Solanki Princess. He loved the Queen too blindly to refuse her word even in the matters of the state administration and it proved a slur on his otherwise spotless character.

Jagadev was in his nineteenth year and many were his personal accomplishments and achievements. His demeanour was dignified and affable. He was brave and wise and was highly revered by the courtiers of the state. He was the most polished young man of Northern India.

Viraja, the chieftain of Tukatoda, a principality in Guzarat, had a beautiful sister Veeramati, who was highly intelligent and well-versed in arts. She could use the bow with extraordinary address and could wield a dexterous weapon. She had often heard of the fair name of

Jagadev and worshipped his figure. One day, Viraja sent the conventional and customary cocoanut to Dhar, to the immense joy of his sister. The marriage was celebrated in due time with great splendour and Veeramati joined her husband.

Jagadev took keen interest in the administration of the state and introduced many useful reforms. He led the Pramara armies against Mahoba and Maheswar and brought victory to Dhar. Jealousy took sprout in the heart of the Queen. She feared that he should try to occupy the throne in preference to her son. She began to poison her husband's ears. Though the king knew that Jagadev was too pure in heart to harbour any ungenerous sentiment, yet, he could not check the haughty Queen. As time went on, the murmur gathered strength and Jagadev himself heard about it more than once.

"Revered father!" exclaimed Jagadev one day "permit me to submit that intense is my desire to travel through '*Aryavarta*' and visit the sacred Ayodhya, the original seat of the Princes of the Solar dynasty, Indraprastha, the abode of the mighty Pandavas and Canouj, the seat of the war-like Rahtore Chiefs. My eternal thanks will be your due if I shall be allowed to absent myself from Dhar for a few years!"

Udayaditya felt extremely sorry but had no inclination to displease the Queen, who was then with him. "Your absence, dear son!" he

observed "will be keenly felt. However, I cannot refuse your request. I wish you a happy and speedy return." Jagadev touched the feet of his father and bowed to the Queen.

He went to his mother and begged her blessing. She was much afflicted and desired him to remember that all her worldly affections were centred around him. Jagadev assured her that he would always enshrine the image of her sacred feet in his heart. He took leave of all and mounted the steed. Inclining his head to the myriads of people thronged at the gate of the capital, he rode off.

At the close of a week, he reached Tukatoda and hearty were the greetings, which he and Viraja exchanged. Veeramati was exceedingly happy. Days passed on like minutes. Viraja entreated his brother-in-law to stay with him, if the object of his travelling was one of pleasure and recreation. Jagadev expressed his thankfulness but assured him that his absence would not be long. Veeramati begged her husband to take her with him. Jagadev consented.

They started the very next morning and reached Patan Anbulwarah, the capital of the Solanki monarch in the afternoon of the third day. They alighted in the grove of trees on the right bank of the 'Sahasralinga' tank. Jagadev asked Veeramati to stay there for a while promising that he would soon return to her, after he arranged a suitable dwelling for their

temporary residence and went into the town. The Princess seated herself on a high pial overlooking the lake. Women who came there in large numbers, were much impressed with her beauty. Some gazed at her with staring eyes; some approached her; while some talked to her. Veeramati spoke to one and all with artless simplicity and perfect candour.

The melodious notes of thousands of birds proclaimed aloud the approach of the pleasant evening and Veeramati was eagerly waiting for her husband when a grand palanquin was borne towards the lake. A fair lady richly attired and ornamented descended from it. "Allow me to introduce myself, Princess Veeramati!" accosted the new lady "as the Queen of Anhulwarah. All well I hope! Jagadev is the sister's son of my Royal husband. As such, my lord recognised and brought him to the palace. Your husband informed us that he had left you here and I came to take you home. A word from your mouth shall command all conveniences and conveyances."

"Excuse me, gracious lady!" replied the Princess, "I am a stranger to these parts and know not we have any relations here. I regret the trouble you have taken in my behalf."

"Proffer no excuses." rejoined the lady "Udayaditya took us to his capital a number of years ago, when Jagadev was but a child and your husband is now surprised. I extend a hearty welcome to you. Let us make a move to the

palace, where, loving and anxious hearts await your arrival." The two ladies took their seats in the palanquin which was speedily moved away into the city.

The strange lady was of medium stature. She looked thirty. Her limbs were robustly modelled and her eyes were beaming with the fire of intelligence. Her face was somewhat handsome and her roguish smiles should have disgusted any physiognomist.

The litter halted before a big mansion. Four maids of honour came and assisted the ladies to alight. They were conducted into the Hall where, they occupied silk - cushioned seats. The conversation flowed upon various topics of interest. The inmates were all courtesy and respect to Veeramati. Very soon a sumptuous repast was enjoyed. The lady of the house led the Princess to a richly adorned apartment in the third storey, which was profusely lighted and copiously furnished and equipped. Intimating that her lord would join her the moment, he returned to the palace, she went downstairs. Veeramati felt exhausted through the long journey and slowly slumber stole upon her.

Now, a fashionable young man entered the room, noiselessly closing the door behind him. He was tall and elegantly dressed. His face exhibited an expression of joy and zeal and his look was mischievous. He stood at a distance and soliloquised "Ah! what a glorious vision greets my

eyes! What unrivalled grace and charms are there seated on the brow of this sleeping beauty! A divine apparition is revealed to my eyes! Surely she must be of celestial breed! How marvellously are her features shaped! She is the acme of feminine elegance! Robed in rich flowing white silk, she surpasses even Angels! Is she indeed sleeping?

The Princess now suddenly chanced to wake up. "Why have you not yet come, my Lord!" uttered Veeramati, opening her eyes. Her looks met those of the young man and she rose from her seat startled and bewildered." Who are you?" thundered Veeramati, "What means this dirty intrusion?"

The young man gazed at her, with looks of passionate admiration. "Pardon me, paragon of beauty!" he said. "for having disturbed you at this untimely hour. Allow me to say that myriads of maids of honour and thousands of other servants await your further pleasure, here. I, privileged with the high honour of enjoying your sweet presence, you must know, belong to an illustrious Kshatriya House. My father is the great Premier of this state. I am versed in all arts. I can dexterously use ponderous weapons. The monarch of Anhulwarah entirely depends on the strength of this strong arm for the safety of his kingdom and people call me as Laldas! You might have already guessed the sweet purpose, that brought me here. Needless to observe that cupid is always most merciless."

With the speed of lightning, truth flashed to her mind. It intuitively struck her that she was not in a respectable abode,—no friendly heart breathed in that quarter—her husband should have been waylaid and her position was in danger. She at once took a courageous and heroic resolve. “You have, with unpardonable grossness” she sternly observed “transgressed the decent bounds of courtesy and wounded my feelings. I am the wife of Jagadev, the great Prince of Dhar. The person, who flings vicious looks on women, is a veritable traitor to woman-hood and to the country that gives him birth! You deserve severe punishment for your ungenerous behaviour. Court not disaster and destruction by remaining here any longer. Take yourself off!”.

“Do not be offended, fair one!”. interrupted Laldas “Suppose, you behold a superbly handsome flower in your way; your hand will, at once, go to pluck it. Nobody can then accuse you of injustice or impropriety. You are the most beautiful flower in the great garden of Hindusthan. All my wealth and power will I most willingly place at your feet and serve you most obediently. Become the Queen of my heart. I implore you. (Kneeling at her feet) Pray, do not disappoint me!”

“Stop this nonsense, foolish man!”. hotly pealed Veeramati “No one had hitherto quenched his thirst with a cup of poison—no one had appeased—his appetite by devouring the red-hot

iron ball-no one had before safely placed a burning thunderbolt as a crown over his head. Know you not how the Demon-king Ravana, the Forest lord Viranayak, the superhuman Nahusha and the terrible Kichaka were burnt to ashes before the fiery look of 'Patiwratas'?—Withdraw from my presence at once!"

"Know you then, lady of haughty beauty!" exclaimed the man "you cannot leave this mansion without my mercy" and he flung a significant look at her.

"Your mercy" interrupted the Princess "would be the last thing I would wish for. I am a stranger to fear and I should not seek the help of another even if the whole world were to stand against me! If I shall be strong enough, I can go out of this den—otherwise, I shall perish."

"Play not with my patience." interposed Laldas, in a tone, stern and firm "Your virtue is beyond safety."

"To violate my virtue" sternly opposed the lady "is certainly beyond the limited power of Satan that gave breath to you. Even the whole Universe might turn up-side down. The Sun and the Moon might travel astray. But, never could my virtue be tarnished."

"Obstinate and foolish girl!" threatened the Premier's son "you have not understood your position at all. A maid - servant of this house heard your story in the afternoon and informed her mistress. When I requested the mistress to

oblige me by bringing you, she obeyed me implicitly. The lady, who brought you, was no Queen. She is Jamothi, an ordinary dancing girl. Your husband is in custody under my command and hundreds of my sturdy men can arrest your progress under any circumstances.

It is night - and new are the house and town,
Thy husband absent - and no help comes down.
Woman thyself - and I a daring heart.

Think well and deep before you will chat!

I allow you fifteen minutes' time for a favourable answer." He stood composed, confident that this revelation might entirely crush her pride.

The Princess felt her blood boiled with fury. "Coward!" she thundered, drawing herself up in a most defiant posture "say you, I am helpless and dare you to terrify me? I am protected from head to foot by the panoply of the strongest virtue! I can withstand even a hundred thousand armed and armoured champion warriors. Fear, which you so ardently call to your aid, should shudder to the core when it comes in contact with a virtuous woman. Villain! dare you to fix time to me? I will myself, on the other hand, grant you time for a quarter of an hour. Know well that you stand on the verge of the summit of vice! If you were to move an inch farther, you should fall headlong into the precipice as a mass of flesh! You have walked yourself into the terrible mouth of a ferocious whale, taking it for a love-boudoir.

To play a joke, you thrust your head between the jaws of a mighty lioness. You have been playing with Death. Perhaps your vision is too hazy to perceive clearly through things. Behold! your fatal hour is drawing near and the demon of Death is just within two or three yards from you! If you, through pride and vanity, waste your time I so mercifully accorded to you, fault shall not be mine!"

It was a severe shock to Laldas and he stood utterly dismayed and bewildered. "She bursts upon me like a terrible storm." he wondered within himself "The angry looks from her crimson eyes awfully smite me. But, am I to abandon the enterprise at this stage? She is not the terrible Kali after all. The shaft darted off from the bow—it should not and could not be brought back! When once a doubt is harboured, even the rope, besides looking like the serpent, seems to move on! Let me attempt once more." He stooped forward and in a soft and tender tone, uttered "Veeramati! Veeramati".

"Dare you to address me thus unmannerly, wretch!". vociferated the Princess, her eyes vomiting cinders "May your tongue crash into millions of fragments!"

"The period I fixed", he observed impatiently, "is almost over!"

"Yes", retorted the lady "Your period is coming to a close. I am quite ready to tear you with this sharp sword. I can no longer wait. I must put an end to this disgraceful scene!"

"Allow me but one kiss" he vehemently and passionately entreated "and then have your own way."

"Advance but a single step, detestable dastard!" she reiterated, foaming with rage "my poniard will drink your heart's blood." She now lifted her sword.

"Stone - hearted woman!" he observed, in disgust, "embrace me or I shall take you into my arms by force." He now dared to extend his hand towards her, as if to snatch her into his bosom!

"Down with you." rang the sonorous voice of the brave Princess and the next moment, the head flew high in the air and Laldas fell a corpse to the ground.

Veeramati, however, could not bear the ghastly sight! She covered the trunk and the head with the carpet on the floor and huddled it through the window. It fell down on the roadside with a heavy dull sound. She locked the door inside and seated herself on the sofa. A thousand strange thoughts troubled her imagination.

Some time after, the sound of a number of heavy footsteps, ascending the stairs, was heard and the next instant, a number of violent hands knocked at the door. There were thundering voices, "throw open the door". The Princess did not move and the door was unbreakable. "Let us get into the room through the window. Look for ladders." Cried many persons and they descended the steps in a tumultuous rush.

The Princess took her stand by the window. Very soon a sturdy person got up to the top of a ladder. "Wretched woman!" he pealed forth "the murder of Laldas should be avenged. Get yourself ready. Your hour is come." He thrust himself into the window with his head forward. Veeramati cut the neck. The head fell at her feet and the trunk rolled down into the street. Another and another stretched themselves into the window and each met with the same fate, until the last of the dozen ruffians perished.

There was a pause. The morning Star adorned the eastern horizon like a lustrous diamond. Every moment the Princess expected fresh outbursts of attacks and she could not change her stand. There was a great bustle outside: thousands of citizens thronged on the roadside. The King arrived. The minister was there. The woman of the house with her maid-servants was there under arrest. An officer came up and asked Veeramati to come into the Royal Presence. She intimated that if her husband, who had been kept in custody, should be released she would come out. Jagadev was accordingly brought there. Veeramati flung open the door and issued forth to meet him. Sidraj made inquiries into the case. The Premier was dismissed. Jamoti was convicted to six years' rigorous imprisonment, along with her maid-servants. Her properties were confiscated. The king expressed his admiration for the Princess, who, by her daring

and praiseworthy action, protected not only her own chastity but also the chastity of womanhood in future! He was extremely pleased to know Jagadev was the offspring of Udayaditya and his own half-sister, the Solanki Princess. He took the chivalrous couple to his Palace in great procession. Veeramati was a terror to the wicked and an inspirer to the good.

Sidraj appointed Jagadev as his Premier. His family connection gave much interest to his authority. His measures of administration were followed with mature reflection and high sagacity. He was a strict disciplinarian and a veteran legislator. The state flourished under him in plenty and prosperity.

A year afterwards cholera broke out throughout the country in all its virulence. Thousands became its victims. Cities and towns were devastated and depopulated and villages were deserted. The king visited the temple of Kali to implore favours. One day, when he knelt before the shrine, he heard a voice, which spoke thus.—“Offer a Prince of the purest blood to me. The epidemic will subside.”

“Willingly would I offer my head, universal Mother!”. he submitted “Pray, save my innocent subjects.”

“I reserve you” the voice swore “to rule over Anhulwarah, for many years. You have Jagadev, the Premier, with you. Offer him. I am hungry.”

"He is too precious, Mother!" the king said, with determination in his tone, "to be made an offering. Please, appease your appetite with my blood!"

"I would annihilate the country," the voice sternly roared "if you fail to offer him. I would wait on till the day-after-tomorrow morning!"

Sidraj went home broken-hearted. Very soon, the horrible news spread like wild fire. The third day morning, Jagadev most willingly went to the temple. Veeramati walked with him and tides of people flowed to the temple. The king rushed through the crowds and with utmost impetuosity dragged Jagadev out of the sanctuary.

"Disturb him not" thundered the voice and every one stood horror-struck!. Veeramati went behind the idol and cried aloud that a ruffian had been seated there. All were astonished. The man was dragged into the Royal presence. Sidraj ordered him, on pain of death, to speak the truth.

"Gracious Majesty!" he submitted "some of us had been serving under the ex-Premier as robbers and high-way-men. With his fall, extreme penury stared us in the face. At his instigation, I had recourse to this unworthy course to do away with the new Premier." The monarch punished him and banished Dhonger Singh, the ex-Premier, from the country.

Sid Raj, one day, paid a visit to Jagadev and proposed that he would give him Prabhavati

his only daughter and make him king. The Premier was wavering. But Veeramati prevailed upon him on behalf of their noble benefactor. The marriage was celebrated with great pomp and splendour.

One day, Dhir Singh arrived. After the usual salutation, he informed that the enemy had invaded Dhar and imprisoned Udayaditya. The affliction and anger of Jagadev knew no bounds. The next morning, an enormous army started from Patan with Jagadev, Dhir Singh, Veeramati and Prabhavati as commanders. By the end of a week, they were joined by Viraja with a strong contingent of Chawura warriors. The combined forces advanced to Dhar and were met by the enemy. Ah! never valour and dexterity more manifest on the side of the Rajputs! After a desperate fighting of over six hours they defeated the enemy. The victorious armies entered Dhar amidst great rejoicings. Udayaditya was released and his Queen, sons and daughters embraced him.

On the persuasion of the Queen and the representation of Ranadhawal, Udayaditya proclaimed Jagadev as king of Dhar. He ruled Dhar and Anhulwarah blessed long with prosperity and posterity.



DEWUL DEVI.

Mahoba was, from time immemorial, the seat of the Chandaila Rajputs and Pural was conspicuous among her Princes. His father left him as an infant to the care of his worthy Premier.

The Premier, Yadoraj, was of excellent understanding and possessed all the qualities adored by the Rajput. His name was highly respected throughout Rajwarra. His behaviour all the years he acted as Regent and Protector, so exactly suited to the views of the Prince that even at the advanced age of forty, Pural continued himself as much a minor as when his parent left him.

The Jadoons of Biana started on an invasion against Mahoba and Yadoraj arrested their march and drove them back to their capital. Hindown, a flourishing commercial town was sacked and the standard of Mahoba was planted on the plains of Kuttair. The next year, Pural invaded the country of the Goands; but he was badly defeated and put to flight. Yadoraj, collecting his Binafur contingents, led his Prince against the enemy and defeated them. The fortresses of Deogarh and Chandbarri were captured and Gurrah, their capital, was sieged. After a desperate fighting for three days, Yadoraj captured the citadel. He was covered with wounds and when he came to

the tent to kneel before his sovereign to intimate the success, he dropped down and expired.

The Prince, with mingled feelings of joy and sorrow, returned to Mahoba. He sent for the Premier's sons, Aala and Udila and bestowed upon them the high honours of their father and the estate of Kalinjer.

The untimely death of Yasoraj removed the fear from the minds of the enemy who had tried hard to conquer Mahoba. Rao Pujan Singh, the Cutchwaha Prince of Amber, advanced against the territory. The Binafur brothers opposed him. But the proud Rao went back to Amber after a day's fighting! They successfully conducted the siege of Gya. The next year, they defeated and dispersed the enemy at Antervedi, the Mesopotamia of the Doab of the Jumna and the Ganges. They conquered and annexed Rewa to Mahoba. In a very short time, the impetuous brothers became the terror of Hindusthan.

The festival of Floralia was celebrated with great pomp and rejoicings. On a fine morning, Purnal, accompanied by the Purihara Chieftain, encamped at Kalinjer. The Prince happened to see a fine blue mare led by a squire and commanded it should be tied in one of his tents. Meanwhile, Aala went into the Royal presence. "May it please your Highness!" he said, inclining his head "to accept my profound respects. A right Royal welcome to your Highness!"

"I am immensely pleased" observed Pural "with you! Aalaji! the most attached of my chieftains. It was with such well-meant feelings that I took your superfine mare into my custody and I would expect you to make a present of the noble animal to me." He flung a look full of significance in the face of the Premier.

"Your Highness is entirely mistaken" exclaimed Aala, in a dignified tone. "There are ever three things, the noose, the horse, and the spouse, that should never be demanded of a Rajput. Your Highness has unfortunately transgressed the bounds of even the most ordinary courtesy. With due deference to your Highness, I refuse to part with the animal, insignificant as she is."

"A chieftain, who respects not the word of his sovereign, is a downright sinner." interjected the Prince, a flush of indignation reddening his cheeks. "I command that you, on pain of death, should, before the next morning, with family and all belongings, remove yourself from Kalinjer and proceed to whichever dominion you like. I banish the Binafur family from my kingdom."

"God only could know the heart of man." calmly replied the Binafur chieftain. "I believed, sire! that the meritorious services rendered by my father and the various daring exploits accomplished by my brother and by my humble self, were duly recognised and appreciated. But sorely am I disappointed. Yet, I will place your command

on my head and with all the souls attached to my House, will leave Kalinjer within the next hour. I bow to you, sire! for the last time." He departed.

Aalaji went home and within an hour the northern portals of Kalinjer saw the Binafur family traversing into the plains of Sirswah. They went direct to Canouj. Jaichand, the Rahtore monarch, received them and bestowed upon them rich lands and a spacious mansion in the capital as their residence. The brothers lived happily for many years accomplishing dauntless deeds by dint of their courage.

The horse sacrifice "Aswamedha" that was conducted and the subsequent Swayamvara, that was celebrated by the monarch of Canouj, attracted all the distinguished Princes from every part of India. When, in the auspicious hour, the exalted Princess Samyukta, in preference to Princes, threw the marriage garland over the mock effigy put up on the threshold of the great Audience Hall by her father to insult the Chohan Emperor, it burst forth and the stalwart Prithwi Singh, emerging from it like 'Chaturbhuja-Vishnu,' stood in all his extraordinary glory, the forest of plumes over his helmet waving and tossing in the most magnificent manner. He took the Princess by the hand and rode away with her. The tremendous cavalry of Canouj rose in a mass and set out in pursuit of the Royal offender. Prithwi Singh, to gain time, detached every evening some hundreds

of veterans from among his five thousand Regulars, who opposed the enemy. Everyday, the Canouj army pressed onward in overwhelming numbers. The choicest chieftains of the Chohan were slain, including the Maha Rows, Gambhir Singh and Hamir Singh. The wounded and the disabled were left helpless and unattended in the various fields of encounter and when on the evening of the fifth day, the "lion of the world" reached Delhi with his Royal prize, he despatched succour. But before it reached, Purnal, who led the Rahtore rear, had assailed and put them to death.

The emperor was much incensed on hearing the news of the horrid deed and to avenge the atrocity, invaded the kingdom of the Chandaila within the next fortnight. At Sirswah, the advanced post of Mahoba on the banks of the Pahouj, he met Purnal at the head of his army and a most sanguinary battle was fought. The names of Narasing Dev and Veerasing Dev shone brightest on the side of the Chandaila. The victorious Chohan gave Sirswah to the flames and laid waste the plains. Unable to stem the torrent, Purnal retreated to the capital. A council of war met and decided, on the advice of Malan Devi, (the Queen) that a truce should be sought from the formidable foe on the plea of the absence of the commanders Aala and Udila. Jagannayak, the bard of Mahoba, was sent as the envoy.

The great Prithwi Singh, superbly attired, was seated in a high cushioned chair in a spacious

silk pavilion and Chandrabhattacharya, the sacred bard, was to his right. Several Princes and chiefs of distinguished rank were in attendance before him. Jagannayak was conducted into the Royal presence and was shown a seat. After the usual salutation to the mighty emperor and the worthy bard, the ambassador presented gifts, which the great chohan courteously accepted.

"Paramount lord of the world!" submitted the bard "the universe is full of your most illustrious deeds and your great renown surpasses the milky Ocean in brightness. You are the most stalwart sovereign monarch of the world and your stupendous scimitar is dreaded most. Who can dare to stand before your frown, king of thousand kings! My lord Purmal has committed an act, which should be viewed with remorse and shame. You have every reason to avenge. The Chandailas are routed at Sirswah by your most potent hand. The chief commanders Aala and Udila are absent at Canouj. I would entreat you, magnanimous monarch!, not to take Mahoba at such a disadvantage. You already enjoy the highest honour of having fought a thousand battles and the proudest Princes have been reduced to dust. Kindly grant a fortnight's time to my Prince for collecting his forces."

"You need not entreat so far." responded the emperor, with an affable smile. "A worthy brahmin will always be respected by the Chohan and a request from the enemy commands my first

consideration. I will accordingly suspend all martial operations for one full month. But on the morning of the thirty-first-day ask your Prince to meet us in the field without fail." Valuable gifts were presented to the bard, who bowed with respect and withdrew.

Jagannayak's arrival was hailed with expressions of joy by the Chandaila and the very next day, he was deputed to bring the Binafur brothers from Canouj. He, in time, presented himself before them and was duly respected. "The Jagatpati has invaded Mahoba". observed the bard "A fierce battle was fought at Sirswah. Narasing Dev and Virasing Dev fell. Several villages have been given to flames and entire crops burnt. The lord of the world is unrelenting in his destructive work. We requested him for a truce. He has allowed but a month's time. I was sent to take you to aid Mahoba. Pray, save Mahoba from ruin and devastation."

"Perdition on Mahoba" pealed forth Aala, with vexation "and maledictions on the tribe of the Chandaila, that mercilessly expelled us from our home. My father brought up Purnal from his childhood. The Jadoons were restrained and the Goands subjugated by his strong arm. From ten of the surrounding potentates did my father bring spoil to Mahoba. He was, one day, at prayer in the family temple when the infant son of Purnal entered. It was winter and the ground was damp. My father took the shawl from his shoulders,

spread it with his hands and requested the young Prince to stand upon, remarking that it would then be of some value when it was marked with the dust of the feet of his monarch's child. With him, fidelity to the sovereign was the highest of virtues. He lost his life in the last battle at Gurrah and Purnal, who knew him more as a father than as the chief commandant, wept like a child. The whole continent of India trembled at the very name of Rao Pujan Singh of Amber and the mighty Shahbuddin Ghorî fled like an antelope at the terrible roar of that formidable lion in the wilds of the frontier district of Peshawar. It was my faithful hand that arrested his irresistible march against Mahoba. The war-like Amirs of the Sultan fled before me. I routed the enemy at Gaya and added Rewa to Mahoba. I burnt Antervedi to ashes when it disobeyed his commands. I gained forty battles for him. Seven times was I severely wounded and thrice death seemed inevitable! Even when he pronounced the sentence of banishment on my illustrious family, I never showed a trace of disobedience. I richly preserved his dignity and my fidelity and left Mahoba within a few minutes. I could now only wish eternal prosperity to Mahoba but will not set foot on her soil." He now hung down his face, probably to hide a tear.

"Sad was the tale of your exile" rejoined the bard "and even time could not erase even a fraction of ferocity. But sadder still is the

condition of Mahoba. The fame of the Chandaila is departing. Your father, the great Yesoraj, brought up Pural with all love and affection. He rendered meritorious services to his Prince. As sons of Yesoraj, you should not abandon Pural in his misfortunes and afflictions. Can you get sound sleep when the Prince is in imminent danger? There is no sin, for a Rajput, more abominable than abandoning his monarch when in distress. True it was that he caused unpleasantness and trouble to you. But, to forget the wrongs committed by the sovereign and serve him with loyalty, are the highest of 'Dharmas' of the true Rajput. Malan Devi reared you in her lap and grief has taken a permanent seat on her face since you left Mahoba. Often would she look towards Canouj and exclaim 'my sons! were you made foreigners to me and to Mahoba! Know you not, that my soul is painfully afflicted at your absence!' and tears gush out from her eyes in streams. It is more on account of her that I came here. I entreat you to forget the past and forgive the unpleasant." The bard fixed his looks on Udila.

"Pural drove us from our home," sternly exclaimed the younger Binafur" as if we were wild beasts. Because he was reared by our father, we bowed to him and worshipped him. Because he was our sovereign, we served him with the strongest devotion. From seven battles did I carry 'jayapatra' the bulletin of victory, to him. Yet, he exiled us. Canouj could well continue to be our

home. We would not keep our heads towards his territory even in our sleep and my reply would be the same whether to the ungrateful Prince or to the Queen, who would not reverse the disgraceful sentence passed by her husband upon us." Udila rose from his seat and he was about to step aside.

"Beware of what you talk! Dare you to disrespect my goddess-like Queen!" vociferated Dewul Devi, rushing precipitately, with a sword in hand towards them, vomiting cinders and angry coals. "Useless fellows! you are ungrateful wretches. It is all the same whether you are alive or dead if you do not rush to her rescue. What am I before the Queen of the noblest type? Did she ever present anything to her son in preference to you? Dare you to say that her tenderest heart knows deceptions and differences? Destruction upon your valour when you could not serve Malan Devi. Ah! how I wish, God had made me barren! You have disgraced my womb with your birth and polluted the world with your presence. Most unworthy creatures! you could not be the offspring of the magnanimous Yasoraj! Surely, some heinous Hydra should have crept into my embrace and from such, you might have sprung. The heart of the true Rajput dances with joy at the mere mention of battle. You are no Rajputs. Take yourselves off or, I would cut you to pieces!" She now lifted the sword.

"I am extremely sorry" exclaimed Aala, at once kneeling at the feet of his mother, "and I am

overwhelmed with shame. I admit the grave mistake committed in a moment of rockblind anger and would atone for it by laying down my life in the cause of Malan Devi. I would sooner perish than wound her soft feelings. Good mother! when the reverberations of my ponderous war-shell deafen the ears of the enemy, when my blue charger trots on the helmets of the Chohan cavaliers, when my broad sword carries death into their dense ranks, when torrents of blood flow in the field, when Earth and Heaven tremble under my heroic lion - roar, when thousands of heads roll on the ground like balls of clay, when I am covered with wounds fresh and bright like the lotuses and when I leave behind me a deathless name, then, would you excuse me! Mother! then would you rejoice." He stood hanging down his head. Udila also prayed they might be forgiven.

"Fly to Mahoba." commanded Dewul Devi "When you uphold the fame of the Binafur house and serve Malan Devi with fidelity, then, I shall be pleased—not now."

The brothers flew to Jaichand and represented the necessity of their return to Mahoba. The monarch consented and presented them with the richest gifts. He sent a contingent of five thousand Rahtore Regulars under Lakshman Singh along with them. On the morning of the third day, the proud towers of Mahoba greeted

their eye. Purmal advanced to meet them. He embraced them and conducted them to the capital. The Binafur brothers screwed every nerve to collect the maximum force.

An emergent war council met and discussed the ultimatum from Delhi, which required the Chandaila to meet the emperor in the field or hand over Mahoba to the imperial hands if the question of battle was dropped. The Binafur brothers, clad in saffron robes 'emblem of no quarter' entered the Hall.

"Gracious Prince!" exclaimed Aala "Prithwi Singh is the proudest and the most formidable of all. All chivalry in the land cannot stand before him! Even the Sun and the Moon stand amazed at his radiance. But, Mahoba and my life are inseparable and death is a feast to me. Fly the standard of Mahoba high, we will rally round to share victory or death. We will never look back but will rush forward even when the sword of the enemy cuts our throats. Permit me to embrace your sacred feet now." He bowed.

The delivery of Aala filled the monarch and the vassal chieftains with joy. The sound of the war-shell reached 'Kailas' and the lion - horn resounded through the air. Thousands of warriors thronged around the banners of Mahoba and were ready to meet the Chohans.

Aala went to his mother. "Good mother!" he addressed "my thoughts are centred round the preservation of the honour of my Prince and my

Binafur house. Tell her, I give the option to her, either to live or to depart. If she lives she can certainly be the emanation of Gouri" He then kissed Endol, his infant son, in the lap of his mother and told him that he was leaving Dewul Devi to his care.

"Well have you spoken, my son!" said Dewul Devi "but remember Mahoba would be lost if you were to be defeated. Nothing should be more shameful and disgraceful than to pay homage and accept vassalage to Delhi. Oh! son! by your dexterous deeds, make your mother's milk resplendent."

"Mahoba is safe" submitted Aala "while yet a spark of life lurks in my body. In the cause of my Prince, Death should be a bride of sixteen summers to me." Then, he approached Malan Devi.

"Mother!" he said, slightly inclining his head in token of respect "if the empire of the whole world were placed at my feet and a choice left to me between the adoptive mother and the empire, I could not accept the empire in preference to you. Even the most dangerous hemlock turns itself into the coolest nectar when an atom of dust from your sacred feet falls into it. Mother! I am ever the child of your lap. I must make the banner of Mahoba red with my heart's blood. I know I could not sufficiently repay the deepest debt I owe to you, even if I were to serve you for thousands of lives. I swear I shall be true to my salt." He now prostrated to her.

The Queen was so deeply moved that she spread two valuable shawls on the shoulders of the hero and bestowed the blessings, extending her hands over his head. A gold vessel, filled with gems, was wheeled round thrice before his face and the contents were distributed among his followers.

Early in the next morning, thirty thousand horse bounded into the plains like the swift winged arrows. The paramount sovereign of India, scorning the advantage of numbers, ordered a selected body of equal magnitude to go forward from the multitudes of his army. The sound of the war-trumpets resounded through the air and Aala rushed forth on the enemy like a tiger, loosened from the chain. Prithwi Singh so much appreciated his dexterous intrepidity that he advanced to engage him personally. The weapons clashed and a terrible fight ensued. The great Chohan was conspicuous by his superior preponderating muscular strength, while Aala confronted him with wondrous swordsmanship! Two fierce tigers could not have fought; two mighty Oceans could not have dashed and two huge mountains could not have fallen upon each other more terribly than they did! After a quarter of an hour both the heroes disengaged themselves.

Udila and Lakshman Singh rushed upon the van of Delhi and cut down hundreds. The Purihara Chieftain conducted himself no less bravely. But Aala was to be seen everywhere in

the field. The flames of his anger consumed the rival army and thrice did he lead his squadrons into the thickest of the enemy. His lance penetrated through the steel-clad breasts of many a champion warrior. He was the midday Sun in the sky of the battle field. He swept off the foes as furiously as if they were mere hay! He ran through the field like wild fire! The Chohans darted on him like thunderbolts! Aala, with many wounds, looked all the more bright than the setting Sun! Yet, he shed terrors and swam in the Ocean of blood! Utter annihilation prevailed wheresoever his charger set his foot! At last, spreading the carpet of the slain, the setting Sun sank.

With the fall of Aala, the battle abated and the next day, the Chohans took possession of Mahoba! But Aala immortalised his great name! A more noble specimen of the world's hero, we have yet to see in the history of mankind.

TARAH BAI.

"**W**hat moral effect, the name he bore, had on Prithwi Raj we can surmise only from his actions which would stand comparison with those of his prototype, the Chohan of Delhi and are yet the delight of the Sesodias. When they assemble at the feast after a day's sport, or in a sultry evening spread the carpet on the terrace to inhale the leaf or take a cup of "Kusoomba", a tale of Prithwi Raj, recited by the Bard, is the highest treat they can enjoy."

"Lieutenant Colonel James Tod."

Rana Raimal ascended the gadi of Chittore in 1474 and ruled for over thirty years, as sovereign of Mewar. Except for the feuds and dissensions among the sons, his reign was altogether happy and spotless. The people of Rajwarra, highly respected him. He had three sons; Sangram Singh, the heir-apparent, was wise, polite and decorous in manners; deliberate cool and just in judgment; brave and heroic in disposition—a rare specimen of personal attraction. Prithwi Raj, the second son, was intrepid, dexterous and adventurous and would always search for a strife. He was the Rolando of his age. He proved to be a source of great trouble to his father and his brothers through his daring and often dangerous actions. When not engaged abroad, he would turn his arms

against the capital. Jaimal was a jovial, gay and easy-going young man at all times.

The heroic Sangram thought it wise to be distant from his brother Prithwi and took to voluntary exile into Sri Nagar. Raimal banished Prithwi Raj from Mewar, commanding that he might live on his bravery and maintain himself with perpetual strife! Prithwi Raj left his paternal abode with five of his choicest followers and turned to Godwar, a province on the outskirts of Marwar.

Godwar was, from time immemorial, governed by Meras (Menas) the aboriginal proprietors of the region. Prithwi Raj strategically entered Nadole, its capital. It was evening. The Mera chief was being taken in procession along the streets and all the citizens thronged around him. Prithwi Raj went through the crowd and transfixed the Prince to the ground with his lance. With the death of the chief, panic seized the few warriors around him and Prithwi Raj and his men showered blows from their swords. After a desperate fighting, Prithwi Raj got the upper hand and the capital of Meras fell in his hands.

Thoda, a principality in Central India, was for some centuries, the seat of the Princes of the Solanki clan, one of the most valiant tribes not only of the Agniculas but of the Rajput races. Its Princes have immortalised their glorious names in the heroic songs of the bard and numberless

were the occasions when they encountered the foreign foes and repelled their assaults.

Lilla, the Afghan, with regiments like the waves of the mighty Ocean, invaded Thoda and the forces of the Solanki, under her Prince, Rao Soorthan, were completely routed. The shelterless Soorthan settled himself at Bednore, a small principality at the foot of the Aravalli hills, within the bounds of Mewar. The broad sword in his dexterous hand gave way to the plough and he took to agriculture rearing his motherless child with the utmost parental care. Tarah was the whole universe for Soorthan.

Rao Soorthan was highly cultured and no country could ever produce a better specimen of a courteous and affable gentleman. Tarah used to receive much of her valuable instruction from him. He would recite numerous anecdotes on chivalry and morals from the great Ramayana and the heroic Mahabharata. Eagerly she heard about the unbounded heroism of Savitri, the tense devotion of Damayanti and the inflexible fortitude of Droupadi from the Puranas. Her joy knew no bounds when her father described the enchanting valour of Samyukta in the last war on the Caggar, the soul-inspiring sacrifice of Pritha and the remarkable perseverance of the virtuous Padmini from the page of history.

Tarah could be seen in the hours of dawn on horse back, armed with bow and arrows, in the outskirts of the great citadel of Bednore. She could,

with unerring aim, throw the arrow from her steed while at full speed and strike the swiftest bird on its wings in the high blue sky. She could use the sword with extraordinary delivery and address. She was of sufficient age to be troubled and stimulated by the reverses of fortune of her renowned house and her soul was ever burning with the perpetual thirst for action and redemption of the independence of Thoda.

Tarah's fame as the embodiment of beauty traversed throughout Rajaputana and suitors from all parts thronged to Bednore in large numbers. One fine evening she was sitting in a bower in the garden adjoining her abode. The crystal waters of the brooklets murmured. Sweet were the fragrances of the full blown blossoms and melodious were the notes of the aerial wanderers. Soorthan Rao was looking after the "Fauna and Flora" when, a fashionable young man sought permission to see him. The necessary permission being accorded, he entered the garden.

He was of the middle stature; his features regular and imposing; his complexion fair and dress elegant. He was of a jovial disposition and a smile often danced between his lips.

"Allow me, Chieftain!" observed the young man "to pay my profound respects to you. A very important matter has brought me here. Can you spare me some time?"

"I would certainly oblige you" replied Soorthan in a courteous tone, "but before I do so, I

should like to know whom I have the honour of addressing to."

"I may inform you without restraint that I belong" responded the stranger "to the most illustrious house in India and own a pedigree, which none else can hope to possess. I am the favourite and fortunate son of the Maharana of Chittore and people call me as Prince Jaimal. My two brothers being banished by my father, I am now the heir-apparent of Mewar."

"I shall be immensely pleased, Prince!" exclaimed Soorthan Rao "to know the most important errand that has brought you so far to Bendore especially in this suffocating hot season."

"The chief of Bednore" replied Jaimal "has been sick. I came to see him and wanted to avail myself of the opportunity of paying a visit to you. I hear you have a daughter, fair and brave, bearing the worthy name Tarah" and he now flung an inquiring look over his countenance.

"True it is that I possess." observed Soorthan "But how is she concerned with your present purpose?"

"In no way unusual." intervened the Prince, with courtesy in his tone. "I intend to take her with your kind permission, as my wife. I hope you will not discourage the heir-apparent."

"I would be slow to make a promise." said the chieftain. "My daughter should be consulted."

"You may as well do so to-day." hastily interrupted the young man. "Anyhow, do not forego a right Royal suitor like me."

Tarah, who heard the conversation, issued forth from a flowery bower. She was superlatively fair; her form tall and well-built; her features graceful and enchanting. The usual mark of pure musk on her fore-head added elegance to her already fascinating countenance. Her garb was of simple white silk befitting the worthy proportions of her beautiful limbs. Her eyes were beaming with brilliance and unrivalled was the beauty of her dark tresses embellished with the fragrant 'Malathis.' Her ears flamed with diamonds of the most precious order. Tarah could look down with derision even on Sri Mahalakshmi in the grandeur of her superb beauty. She gently saluted her father.

"I have heard your intentions, young man!" exclaimed Tarah, turning her face towards Jaimal. "Needless it would be to wait any longer. I am always decisive and precise in my opinion. Thoda was the abode of my ancestors for many centuries. By reverse of fortune the state was wrested away from my father's hands. I am the only daughter and my parent has experienced a world of trouble in having brought me up. His soul would ever feel thirsty for the redemption of the cherished land. Men are always under a very deep debt to the land of their birth and must be ready to lay down their lives at the altar of her image when necessary. Life would not be worth living to me if I could not sacrifice my all to restore peace to my father's heart. Prince! I must be won by one, who accomplishes this mighty deed! Whoever

accomplishes this, would be considered as the saviour of the Solanki race and I would run with open arms to receive the champion." The maiden shone in her best and highest colour and looked bewitchingly beautiful.

"Paragon of beauty!" ejaculated the Prince, astonished to hear her patriotic delivery "my pledge is given. You have my solemn vow that Thoda should be soon got back. I shall be grateful to you if you can oblige me with an interview on the subject."

"You have not comprehended me fully." said Tarah "Nothing can be done before the accomplishment of the deed. Redeem Thoda and your claim will be considered with due weight."

"Believe me." entreated Jaimal, in a soft and tender tone, "A confidential talk will set at rest all your hesitation and infuse into you confidence."

"Beware! how you trespass the bounds of ordinary courtesy and feminine delicacy." roared Tarah "No more of it."

The Prince was dismayed and bewildered, "Beautiful one!" he continued, in a subdued tone, "mine is a word of honour. Do not trouble yourself about Thoda. Think of only becoming the Queen of Mewar. Fair Tarah! become the 'Tara' of my destiny even now. I can wait no longer."

He walked a few paces towards the maiden, "Stop short." vociferated the infuriated father. The Prince, with impassioned looks, extended his hands towards Tarah. The broad sword of Rao

Soorthan flashed like lightning and instantaneously divided Jaimal into two.

The Rana was seated in the Suryabhavan (the Audience Hall) on the throne attended by all the vassal chieftains and the officers of the state. The unpleasant and unfortunate death of Prince Jaimal was reported and many were the voices that urged for immediate vendetta. The Rana sternly opposed observing that Jaimal very richly merited the punishment, as he had thus dared to intrude on and insult the honour of a motherless maiden and her father, who is in great adversity. He made a permanent grant of Bednore principality to Rao Soorthan with hereditary powers, in atonement of the atrocity committed by Jaimal.

Happy the land, where rules a sovereign with a magnanimous heart without yielding to the ill advice of the adherents and worships Justice even at the sacrifice of things dearest to his heart. At the close of the period of mourning, the Rana forgave and recalled his son Prithwi Raj to the capital. Prithwi Raj returned and did all he could to mitigate his father's sorrow and after a month took his permission to visit Bednore.

On a fine morning, he was seen entering the fortress of Bednore. He went straight to the chieftain's abode. Rao Soorthan and Tarah were seated in the Hall. The usual salutations and greetings were exchanged. "Exalted chieftain of the Solanki House!" exclaimed Prithwi Raj "I very deeply sympathise with you in the

unhappy catastrophe for which my brother Jaimal was the cause and I highly respect your parental feelings. I accept the gage thrown down to my brother by your daughter. I would like to start to 'Thoda, the next moment'. (Turning to Tarah) "Fair maiden! I know you are intensely devoted and attached to your worthy father. I take up the onerous task of redeeming Thoda and would not wink until I achieve the object. Mine is a burning soul, ever embracing perils. Nothing shall stand in my way. I pledge my honour and the honour of my Suryavamsa. Mewar shall be a foreign land to me as long as my object remains unfulfilled. If, by God's grace, I could make myself worthy, I might come and see all of you once again. I give my word as a Rajput."

Soorthan and his daughter were much impressed with the high sincerity and straightforwardness of his delivery. "Exalted Prince!" exclaimed the aged chieftain "you are a worthy son of a worthy father. I have, many a time, heard of your dexterous exploits. You have signalised your great name in the conquest of Godwar. I give due weight to your honourable word. Tarah is in her sixteenth year. An aged daughter is a burden to the father. I will gladly place my confidence in advance in you and bestow my daughter upon you. Pray, accept her and be happy."

A blush of the delicate tint of the rose spread over the fair cheeks and the beaming star of Bednore slightly bent her beautiful head with

the gentle smile peeping through her coral lips. Prithwi Raj felt immensely honoured.

The marriage was celebrated in due time with great pomp in all the Oriental splendour at Bednore and the bride and bride-groom left for Chittore on an auspicious day. The very next day, the reverberations of the great martial 'Nagaras,' the grand kettle-drums of Mewar, proclaimed far and wide the march of Prithwi Raj against Thoda.

It was just the beginning of the Persian year. The anniversary of the martyrdom of the sons of Ali was celebrated with great pomp at Takshsila, the capital of Thoda and attractive were the public rejoicings in the evening. Prithwi Raj set out with five hundred of his choicest cavaliers. The courageous Tarah accompanied him insisting that she would not idly sit at home while her lord engaged himself in the daring attack and she would partake of his glory as well as danger. The band of the selected horsemen reached Thoda and Prithwi Raj, leaving his warriors in the outskirts of the city, entered Takshsila accompanied only by Tarah and the Sengar chief, who was his inseparable friend and commander. Enormous was the crowd that accompanied the bier containing the effigies of the martyr-brothers, when it was being brought to the square. The procession passed under the balcony of the magnificent palace, in which Lilla was standing with a majestic appearance returning the salutations of the people with a smiling face, when, suddenly, an arrow from the bow of the

Amazonian heroine, Tarah, stretched him on the ground. All was panic in the big crowd and before the people could recover themselves, the three riders made good their way to the outer gate of the town, where, a huge elephant furiously encountered them. Prithwi Raj was in front and before he propelled his lance on the enormous beast, Tarah, with her sharp-sword cut its trunk into two.

Prithwi Raj stormed the city. So abrupt and impetuous was the desperate rush of the Rajput cavaliers that the Afghans were all confusion and disorder and could not speedily rally. Prithwi Raj and Tarah exerted all the energies and their troops were inspired with no inconsiderable amount of their zeal and valour. The falchion of Prithwi Raj carried death with the rapidity of lightning and Tarah closely followed him with all the daring spirit. The conflict remained threatening for hours and by dusk the enemy were completely routed. The victorious Prithwi Raj entered Thoda.

Indescribable was the pomp with which Rao Soorthan was inducted into the inheritance of his ancestors and afterwards he never knew sentiments of despair. Tarah was happy with Prithwi Raj, who, from love of glory, filled many a song of the bard with his daring exploits and amply emblazoned the pages of the history of Mewar.

KARNAVATI.

Maharana Sangram Singh immortalized his name in the battle of Biana in 1528 when he was opposed by Baber, the founder of the Mogul empire. He was succeeded by Rutna, who ruled only for five years. Vikramajit ascended the throne after him and Mewar might have enjoyed immense tranquillity and prosperity during the peaceful reign of Humayun, had it not been for his insolent and vindictive character that displeased his nobles and vassals most.

Vikramajit believed and appreciated that it was the strength of artillery, that could make one glorious; that the artillery made dreadful havoc in the close ranks of the Rajput cavalry and that Baber was enabled to get victory. So, he engaged mercenary troops skilled however in the use of fire arms. It was the only cause for consternation to the Rajputs, whose chivalrous customs and practices, coupled with prejudices, made them prefer falling with dignity from their war-chargers, to sinking into an equality with the infantry of the enemy.

Taking advantage of the disunion and disaffection between the monarch and the soldiery, Bahadoor, king of Guzarat, determined to invade Mewar. The King of Mundore helped him with men and money. He advanced against Vikramajit,

then touring in the Boondi State. The Rana received little help from the Rajput chieftains, who, abandoning him to his fate, marched off with their auxiliaries to defend Chittore and Udai Singh, the infant son of Sangram. The innumerable ramparts, towers, bastions and parapets of the mighty bulwark were studded with thousands of armed warriors.

Bahadoor stormed Chittore. The attack was commenced on the 'Suryadwar' and heavy was the cannonading. The brave Rajputs, with unremitting valour, defended the rock. Intrepidity and resoluteness had never been more vividly exhibited. Like the hungry tigers, the Tartars rushed against the fort and the Rajputs conducted themselves like fierce lions. Every inch of the land, from the gate to the plain below, was inundated with torrents of blood. Animated by the noblest sentiments of devotion and patriotism, the Rajput cavaliers screwed every nerve to overthrow the enemy. The siege went on for months and years. The battle raged more and more terrible. The besiegers and the besieged were equally exhausted and the provisions in the fort considerably decreased.

Karnavati, the Queen-mother, under instructions from her brother Arjun Rao, the Prince of Boondi, sent her infant son Udai Singh through Chukasari, a Rajput of a daring character, to Boondi, where he left him to the care of Soorthan Rao, son of Arjun Rao. She made ready the

Katchli, (bracelet of gold) set with diamonds and sent it through her ladies-of-honour to Humayun, the Padusha of Delhi. A large retinue of ladies of the highest rank took the 'Rakshi'. They were joined by many more of the same sex at Boondi. They arranged a magnificent gold plate in a grand litter in which were placed the bracelet and the letter of the Queen with the sweetest flowers. They then rode fast to Delhi, where they were met with the sorest disappointment. The emperor was absent, engaged in the Bengal subjugation-work. Thither they proceeded with the most anxious hearts. Humayun was seated on a high-cushioned chair in a spaciousy accommodated silk pavilion. The ladies entered in a body. The great monarch bowed to them with respect and requested them to take their seats.

"Illustrious ladies!" he exclaimed "it is with extreme pleasure that I proffer the heartiest welcome to all of you. I am sorry for the trouble you have taken in coming all the way over hundreds of miles to Bengal. I do now gladly pledge and devote myself to the sacred cause that has brought you here, what-so-ever its nature might be."

The dames were immensely pleased with the frankness and the high courtesy of the great Mogul. "Paramount lord of India!" they said "allow us to convey to you the thanks of the magnanimous Karnavati, the Queen-mother of Mewar. Her gracious ladyship sends through us, her most attached women, a letter and a bracelet,

in token of her sisterly regards towards your majesty”.

Two of the ladies brought and placed the gold plate before him on the table. Humayun rose and inclining his head in token of acknowledgment of the worthy present, touched the plate with his hands. One of the ladies then read the letter as follows:

“Great monarch of the Moguls! it is with the utmost delicate sentiment and feelings of fraternity that I address this letter to your Imperial majesty. Bahadoor has been conducting the siege of Chittore for over twelve months. My revered husband, the great Sangram Singh, is no more. I was held back from committing ‘Sati’ to rear and look after Udai Singh, my infant son, just then born! Vikramajit commands no love of the Rajputs. Bahadoor has been unrelenting in his destructive enterprise and we could expect no help from outside. We have our own grave apprehensions. I have, in this dire emergency, according to the delicate and sacred custom in Mewar, determined to invest you with the title of my ‘saviour’. Pray, accept the bracelet and redeem Chittore from destruction. I know a magnanimous sovereign like you, will never look to the intrinsic value of the bracelet but will look to the heart that prompted it to be sent. May God enhance your prosperity and long life. It is my most heart-felt prayer.

Your sister,
KARNAVATI DEVI.”

The Padusha was deeply touched with the pathetic delivery of the letter. "Worthy ladies!" he replied, with sublime softness in his voice "I feel myself highly exalted at the signal distinction shown to me by the worthy Queen of the great solar House. With the most blissful emotion, I thank her gracious ladyship for the great boon conferred on me. She has bestowed upon me the greatest honour, which no other foreigner or Tartar, could ever have dreamt of. Chivalry, love and honour are the worthy sentiments common to all nations and for all times. Unworthy is the religion, that prevents persons from extending their helping hands to serve those, who are in danger. I hereby proclaim that I am a brother to the worthy Queen and uncle to her infant son, Udai Singh. I pledge that their safety and prosperity shall be my constant study and paramount consideration. My revered parent, Baber, fought with the chivalrous Sangram Singh and much affliction had been caused to Mewar. I too took part in the battle. God forgive me for the unpleasantness thus caused! Now, humbly do I avail myself of this opportunity to redress the wrong by serving the Sesodia House with unswerving devotion and thus render my name worthy. I feel more proud as her saviour than as the Delhi Padusha! In the name of all things sacred in the universe, I swear— I rush to her rescue even at the risk of Delhi and my Mogul empire! I should, if need be, even lay down my

life at her sacred feet. I now abandon the Bengal enterprise and rush on to Chittore. I shall drive away Bahadoor and leave Mewar safe in the hands of the worthy Queen."

Humayun took the bracelet with both the hands from a respectable distance, kissed it with his eyes and wore it on his right hand. "The pious formality is completed," he resumed, supreme joy and enthusiasm radiating his face, "I have now become the 'Rakshi-bund-bhoy,'—'the bracelet-bound-brother' of Karnavati Devi. The gracious lady has made me a Rajput in sentiment. I pray, God make me richly deserve her confidence and esteem!". He bowed.

Indescribable was the joy, which the ladies experienced and they expressed their most grateful thanks to the emperor, who at once started for Chittore with the Rajput galaxy and Mogul army.

Bahadoor engaged European artillerists, some of Vasco De Gama's people, to break the fort. A Portuguese engineer had, extensive trenches, excavated under the walls and heaped tons of gunpowder. He had blown up many a strong fort in Hindusthan and earned the title of 'Labri-Khan'. He, at last, exploded a formidable mine, which removed forty-five cubits of the rampart near the 'Beeka-rock'. The besiegers and the besieged rushed to the breach and were locked in a fatal conflict. Arjun Rao jumped into the gorge with five hundred Haras and cut down the enemy in great numbers. No chieftain ever

fought with greater valour and dexterity. His steed darted like the flash of lightning! He spread destruction. Alas! he eventually fell.

The Deora chieftain of Aboo and the Sonegurra Prince of Jhalore roused the courage and determination of their followers and sprang on the foe. Then dashed into the breach, Durga Rao, the Saloombra chief, with his Chondawut squadron. He was fierce like 'Rudra' in the hour of 'Pralaya' and did immense havoc. Like trees falling before the furious blast, fell the troops of Guzarat. But, alas! he too was covered with fatal wounds."

Jawahari Bai, the amazonian Queen of the Rahtore blood, rushed to the fight. Her adherents were animated with stern resoluteness and were actuated by the noble idea of repulsing the unjustified onslaught of Bahadoor. They were thirsting to exhibit their valour. The warrior Queen made an offering of the enemy to her falchion. The foreign troops trembled and showed their backs. But she was the incarnation of 'Rana-Durga', at whose mere breath, swarms of the enemy fell down headlong lifeless. She was everywhere in the thickest and the hottest of fights.

Karnavati exhorted all the ladies in the city to get themselves ready for the fatal 'johar'. They performed their ablutions and wore the gayest garments and ornaments. They anointed their bodies with the paste of sandal-wood and

decked the hair with the fragrant flowers. They were like so many forms of 'Gouri' when they issued in a body, with the virtuous mark of the vermilion powder on their fore-heads and were received by the Queen.

"Worthy sisters!" she addressed, "let me announce this as a day of supreme joy and deliverance. Let us preserve and save ourselves from pollution and captivity. Life, in this world, is a shadow and Fortune is fickle. We are the sweetest flowers in the garden of Rajasthan. Life is but transient and momentary. We, the Rajput ladies, are born for sacrifice and let us now give a signal proof of our worth and illustrate the glory of our race. Remember the days of Padmini, whose brave example serves as the grand beacon in the troubled waters of life! A few minutes ago, my revered sister, Jawahari Bai, immortalised her chivalry by reaping a bumper harvest of the enemy and to-morrow, her name will shine in the pages of the bard in the letters of burning gold. An hour of honour is more precious than centuries of dishonour. If there be any one amongst the ladies gathered here, who may value life above honour, let her remain. The Fire-God, whom, the next instant, we worship, will burn our bodies into carbon. With the strongest determination and the purest spirit of sacrifice, we must accomplish the grand feat of self-immolation. With joy, I shall lead you on. Who are willing, may follow!"

In an extensive subterranean retreat, tons of sandal-wood were piled with heaps of camphor thrown upon. Sandal oil and other perfumes were poured and even more imposing was the scene that followed. All the ladies stood and prayed. They bade the last adieu to their husbands and relations. All of them formed themselves into a mammoth circle hand-in-hand. With glowing cheeks, sparkling eyes and sunny smiles in their moon-like faces, they marched off in a grand procession, with the noblest disregard for life and in a few minutes, the whole assemblage of thirteen thousand Angels of the highest rank were consumed in the devouring flames! Ah! what a sacrifice! These paragons of beauty and virtue, even to-day, parade, attired in garments of fire, before our mental eye!

Torn from the strongest of the worldly bonds, the males felt reckless. They bathed themselves in saffron water and chewed 'pan-supari'. Bhagji, the Deola Prince, mounted the steed. The banner of Mewar floated over his head. The Royal umbrella was hoisted and the 'chamara' waved. Like a gush of fire, he rushed to the breach. The Guzarat warriors dreaded the bitterest impetuosity of the fury of the Rajputs. The conflict raged throughout the day and the heroes of Chittore, cutting the enemy, perished at last. Every clan lost its chief and choicest warriors and during the siege and fighting, thirty-two-thousand Rajputs laid their lives at the altar

of independence. Bahadur entered the capital. He was appalled and dismayed—no Rajput heart was breathing within the breast.

The distressing news of the fatal 'johar' and the fall of the fort spread through the country like wild fire. Humayun had advanced up to Ajmir and his anguish exceeded all bounds. "Alas!" he said "it is a disastrous shock to me and my sweet hopes and noble aspirations are blasted to the winds. The worthy ladies had entertained high hopes that I could overturn the world. I must prove myself a true knight." He immediately despatched a letter, couched in the strongest terms directing Bahadoor to vacate Chittore and go back to Guzarat, on pain of death. He sent strict orders to his ministers in Delhi to send a large contingent of cavalry and sufficient artillery to Ajmir.

The king of Guzarat refused to obey the imperial behest and replied that even the rabbit lodged in Chittore, could encounter the lion. The emperor's anger could not be restrained. He fretted and fumed. The very day, a tremendous army arrived from Delhi, which he personally led and by the end of a week, Chittore witnessed another formidable siege.

The deafening sounds of the Mogul artillery resounded through the air. Heavy was the cannonading that raged throughout the day. Unable to withstand the attack, Bahadoor abandoned the fort and ran away in the middle

of the night. Humayun chased him. He stormed and took Mundore. He sent for Vikramajit and arranged for a grand coronation.

Many chiefs from the adjacent states graced the occasion with their presence. The great Mogul, with his own hand, applied the 'Teeka' on the forehead of Vikramajit and girt him with the sword.

"Honourable chieftains and friends!" He addressed, in a tone highly courteous and dignified, "it gives me yet some pleasure to be present on this momentous occasion. I thought I was the most fortunate and the most exalted among mankind when the Queen Karnavati chose me for her brother and I could not, for a while, believe the blissful hour! It is universally admitted and I do submissively corroborate that the Sesodia House is the most illustrious and the most renowned in the world. Intense was my desire and strongest was my inclination to serve that great House throughout my life. I thought God was immensely liking me, a foreigner and a Tartar, in presenting this golden opportunity and I took pride to proclaim myself as the brother of the Rajput Queen. Perhaps I was not worthy. I am deprived of the highest privilege. I remain a disappointed man. The refulgent 'Soorya', the visible guardian of the universe, is the great originator of the illustrious dynasty. Ikshwaku, Harischandra, Bhagiratha, Mandhata and Sree Ramachandra are the proudest ancestors. It is

the noble family of Sangram Singh, the sovereign monarch of India, whose fame spread through the world like the mighty waves of the milky Ocean. If I had been but blessed to render whatsoever little service my feeble hand could accomplish, my name should have been preserved by posterity as the brother and friend of the Sesodias, the proudest race of the world. I was not so fortunate as to emblazon the page of the high bard of Rajasthan with any noteworthy action. But yet, I feel grateful to God for presenting me with an opportunity to serve Udai Singh, my beloved nephew. I always pray for the high prosperity of Mewar and the Rajput nation and remember I am one with you as a very humble brother of Karnavati Devi." The great monarch took the Prince on his lap and kissed him tenderly. He showered on him many valuable gifts and ornaments and presented the richest apparel. He bowed to all and took leave.

Humayun was a king of the Timoorean House and belonged to a distant country. His father had fought in vain to take Mewar. He belonged to an advantageous age, at which he could have annexed state after state to his vast dominion. Mewar, the bulwark of the Hindu religion and civilisation, was the best of all. On the representation of the Rajput ladies he gave the deepest and the most earnest consideration to the request of Karnavati and abandoned even his long-cherished conquest of Bengal. He travelled a thousand miles to Chittore. He attacked and

drove Bahadoor, a king of his own creed and religion. He redeemed Chittore from danger and with the purest intention placed Vikramajit on the throne. He went back to Delhi with empty hands. Can the world ever produce a more noble specimen of magnanimity and chivalry?



PADMINI BAI.

Alauddin ascended the throne of Delhi in 1296. He was a strong soldier and a stern ruler. He led a formidable military expedition and conquered Malwa. He invaded Berar and Kandesh and subjugated Deogarh. Guzarat was conquered and Kamala Devi, the Queen, was forced to marry him. The Moguls, from Transoxiana, invaded northern India and Alauddin attacked and defeated them. He captured Ranasthambhapur in 1300.

Lakshman Singh was the sovereign of Mewar and Bhim Singh, his uncle, acted as Protector and Regent during his minority. Bhim Singh possessed all the high traits of character that adorned the Rajputs, most. He espoused Padmini Bai, daughter of Hamir Sank, the distinguished Prince of Ceylon. She was universally acknowledged as the most beautiful Princess of the world.

Alauddin turned his arms against Chittore. He led an army of three hundred thousand warriors and besieged the fort. Terrible was the fight that ensued. The bravest and the best Rajputs defended the mighty rock with their characteristic valour and intrepidity. The Sultan intimated that he would, most willingly, cease the siege of the fort, if the beautiful Padmini was at once surrendered to him. The warriors of Mewar

were infuriated and spread destruction in the ranks of the enemy with redoubled ferocity.

Allauddin had, deep trenches, excavated under the stupendous wall on one side and applied destructive machines on another side and tried to bring down the bulwark. But, the fort was impregnable. Days passed — weeks elapsed — and months rolled on.

The monsoon disappointed that year. Not a single drop of water fell from Heavens. No cloud!—no thunder!—no lightning! The sky used to be clear during nights with the numerous constellations spread over its surface, shining like so many groups of brilliant pearls. The reservoirs were dry. Frogs died in the wells. Crops failed and the provisions in the fort were exhausted. The Sultan stopped his bloody operations. He penned a letter and secured it with a soft silken string. The imperial seal was affixed with the address written on it. It was placed in a fine small gold box and was entrusted to a lieutenant, who, in due time, delivered it to the Rajputs.

A grand council was held. Bhim Singh was indisposed and stayed away in his palace. Gora Singh, uncle of Padmini Bai, took the prominent part in the deliberations and the letter ran as follows:—

“Exalted Prince and illustrious chieftains! the ignorance on my part about the magnanimous character of the Rajputs, coupled with my diabolically selfish and ruthless avarice and a

variety of other reasons had prompted me, in the first instance, to lead my armies against Chittore. I feel now actually tortured and am seriously deliberating how I can extricate myself from this most awkward situation. Many were the occasions when, I was on the point of suddenly departing to Delhi, abandoning the extirpating operations. But, the vanity on my part, that the world might think me weak, led me so far. My former intentions indeed impure! My heart has undergone a thorough change and I am now purer. I now considerably modify my desire and wish only to see the image of Padmini Bai. I once more invoke your forgiveness and request you to save me from this unhappy predicament."

The letter created varied feelings of consternation and provocation. The whole assemblage exhibited the awful aspect of the mighty Ocean in its hottest fury! The chieftains expressed their disapproval and discord.

"I despise the proposal of the Tartar," observed Gora Singh. "It is impossible that the Rajputs should succumb to this ignominious condition. With unswerving devotion towards our sovereign and the highest reverence towards the Princess, I strongly urge you all to proceed with the fight with even greater vigour and let us proclaim to the world that the Rajputs could never fail to maintain the purity of their national grandeur and the supreme eminence of their religious glory. The strife ought not be

discontinued till all of us perish—which national calamity, God however forbid!”

The heroic delivery of the veteran chief produced a deep impression. A vivid glow of enthusiasm and resoluteness danced on every countenance. With the loud and congratulatory ejaculations, the Hall reverberated. A liveried officer of distinction approached the dias and submitted that her ladyship, Padmini Bai, wanted to speak. The assembly was all attention.

“Adorable heroes and worthy champions!” addressed Padmini Bai, from behind the drapery, in a sweet and dignified tone. “I am highly thankful to all of you for your most deferential feelings, most sacred regards and most sincere intentions. Mewar ought always to be proud of you all—veteran patriots and tried warriors! The Sultan of Delhi has been conducting the siege for over a year. Thousands of the mighty warriors fell. The provisions in the fort are exhausted. Rains failed and famine is doing its worst in the country. Intermittent fevers have raged and Cholera has broken out. Thousands of all ages are becoming victims to these dire diseases. Pestilential winds blow through the day. People are going mad with fever and hunger and are filled with affliction and dread. I quite appreciate the praise-worthy resolve of my revered uncle, the great Gora Singh. But it is not much for our consideration whether the Sultan is a saintly character or otherwise. He seems to be a vain man, deserving pity and sympathy rather than

anger and vengeance. Allowing prudence to be the most important factor in arriving at a decision especially regarding a question of life and death as the one at the present instance, you may reconsider his request and modify your resolve. True, it might be, that the Rajput ladies are to observe seclusion in the strictest sense but all the same our relations and the family priests do see us in the every day-life. Seclusion is set aside during marriages and the grand festivals of 'Floralia' and we figure there in all the fascinating beauty and personal glory. Chastity, I affirm, is the holiest religion of the heart—not of the eye. Who are blessed with it, are elevated to saintliness and Godliness. The whole universe should shake and even heaven might come down nearer according to the will of a 'Pativrata.' Mighty Gods too shiver before the indomitable soul-force of the virtuous—what of mortals! The Sultan desired not to see me in colour and costume but would be contented if he should only see my image. Weak and utterly worthless should be the Virtue if it could be tarnished or wiped away at the mere sight of a male! To a virtuous lady, the world is the off-spring. I have, up to now, more than half a dozen sons and can look upon the Sultan as one among them; a poor child—but, a little mischievous and wayward. I know, by a skilful arrangement of mirrors, the reflection of an object can be seen at a distance without the object itself being seen. Constant wars have drained Mewar of some of the mightiest warriors and further bloodshed

should be averted. Though I stand behind the curtain-draperies, habituated as I am to restricted customs, I hope my suggestions will command your sympathy and approbation.

The soul-stirring speech of the Princess produced a sublime effect of the most tender and soothing nature upon the assembly. It resembled the passing away of the melodious music, which leaves behind it, the full effect of the soft vibrations of the sweet cadences. Gora Singh, as the chief conductor of the affairs, intimated to the Sultan that, in the noon of the next day, he might pay a visit to the capital.

Alauddin felt as if a flood of heavenly bliss had suddenly inundated his soul. He could not rest at a place. The day heavily passed—the night was a night mare! Ah! how feverishly was he counting seconds on the appointed day for the hour.

The Sultan was a tall and powerfully built person and was in the meridian of his life. His complexion was of dark brown and his forehead was high and broad. His eyebrows were thick and singularly semi-circular. His large eyes flashed the warm fires of passion and his look was sharp and penetrating. His nose was remarkably well-shaped. The black moustache over his lip was bushy and added to his countenance, ferocity to a certain degree. He was broad in his shoulders and cut a formidable figure. He was dressed in soft rich velvet, fringed with gold. He had, on his

head, a turban of the most beautiful satin, richly embroidered. A tuft of valuable crimson plumes waved over it. A long sharp sword adorned his right hand. He bathed his person in the sweetest scents and tried his utmost to be unrivalled in his charms on this special occasion. He stood, more than once, before the mirror and tutored himself to assume a smile over his lip and affability in his manners.

It was noon. The gate of the fort was opened. The imperial Tartar walked with five hundred of his best warriors to the foot of the hill, where he asked them to halt and began to ascend the steps at a fairly rapid pace. Within a few minutes he reached the 'Suryadwar' where, he was respectfully greeted by the commander and the troops. The Sultan gave his sword to the commandant and went through the town amidst the salutations from the rows of well-dressed soldiers posted in the streets at short intervals.

The Royal palace of Chittore, with her proud octagonal towers, stood rising more than a hundred feet from the ground on the margin of the great lake and was the grandest and the most imposing building of the East. The Hall in the palace was spacious. Picturesque paintings of historical importance were drawn and life-size pictures of superior eminence were hung on the walls. The innumerable windows wore the richest cutrains and luxuriant seats were spread. The Sultan ascended the marble stairs and was greeted by the guards

at the 'Ganeshdwar'. Bhim Singh advanced a few paces and after the salutations were exchanged, both of them were seated on two cushioned chairs over which rose velvet canopies, supported by refined silver columns.

"I feel immensely exalted" observed the Sultan" to have been admitted into the Hall of the illustrious sovereign monarchs of the great Solar descent. Your worthy example has worked out a world of change in me and your generosity has roused up the inner man. I am now turned to be a new man altogether."

"You are a great monarch." exclaimed Bhim Singh "Your fame as a warrior Prince, has spread even to the far-off climes. In paying my respects to you, I have, but, discharged my duty towards a brother potentate, who deserves my esteem. God will be pleased at the change of the man's heart for the better."

"A bell rang and perfect silence prevailed throughout the building. A richly framed glass, with a soft canopy hanging over it mounted on a gold stand, was placed along the end of the extensive velvet curtains in the north-western corner of the Hall. Gora Singh intimated to the Sultan of the approach of the appointed time. Alauddin rose and was conducted towards the glass. The cover was gently lifted up. The Tartar gazed with all the famishing regards. The glass was clear. The next instant, the magnificent image of the virtuous Padmini Bai, panoplied in all the

sublime gracefulness, slowly revealed itself to his vision in all its world-conquering beauty almost heightened to divinity.

Padmini Bai was a gracefully tall and elegantly proportioned lady. Her complexion was remarkably fair. Her large dark eyes were beaming with the most brilliant lustre. Her handsome brow surpassed the flowery bow of Cupid in its charming symmetry. Her lips were red and well-shaped and her sweet smiles sometimes awakened the lotus and sometimes the lily. The graces of her soft swan-like neck were unsurpassed. 'Natural beauty, when unadorned, is adorned most!' Her moderately modelled arms were more admirable than the sweetest garlands. She was robed in the most simple manner, in the flowing soft satin. The dazzling diamond pendants in her ears shed a glorious flood of light on her smooth mirror-like cheeks, on which the rose and the lotus were struggling hard, each to establish its own superiority. Her stature was commanding and exhibited the highest feminine dignity. She was the worthiest and the proudest ornament of wifehood — motherhood — nay, entire womanhood! In a word, her natural beauty beggared all precious stones and gold."

A thrilling sensation was shot through every vein of the Sultan's frame and a deep burning glow of ecstasy danced on his face. He was plunged into a delicious reverie. Her heavenly countenance, her Goddess-like appearance, her most

poetic and Queenly beauty and the elysian sweetness of her soft smile made blissful impressions on his mind. He felt as if a shower of nectar fell upon him and the next moment the Tartar monarch, involuntarily lifting up his hands, touched his forehead and bowed to the all-conquering beauty. He, once more, looked into the glass. The image of the worthy Princess had vanished. He felt as if he had been violently snatched away from the sunny Paradise. His vital knots were deeply cut off and he stood motionless like a statue.

"May it please you, sir!" rang forth the sonorous voice of Gora Sing in his ears, in vivid and distinct sounds "to partake of the refreshments."

The Sultan was roused from his dream and beheld, by his side, the gigantic form of the redoubtable warrior chieftain, whose arm extended towards the table. He mechanically followed him and took his seat. He, however, begged he might be excused for not taking anything at that hour but he however tasted some fruit. Pan-supari was distributed.

"Illustrious Prince and chivalrous chieftains!" observed Alauddin, rising from his seat "I cannot sufficiently thank the Rajput nation that has not only excused the worst enemy, who committed a stupendous wrong but has also treated him with the utmost respect. I am sorry to have to bid you adieu for the present. Bless me with your friendly regards. Once more, I crave your forgiveness."

He bowed to the assemblage. All rose from their seats. Bhim Singh walked with the Sultan towards the gate of the capital.

"Revered sovereign!" exclaimed Alauddin "I have the utmost confidence in your superior faith. It is on account of that confidence that I brought no follower with me. I even left my sword with your guards at the gate. I should be committing sin, if I would not entertain the highest feelings of respect towards you."

The two monarchs reached the grand portals of the fort. The guards greeted them there with great obeisance.

"Allow me" said the great Rajput, unwilling to seem lacking in confidence "to escort you to the foot of the hill". Asking the commander and the troops not to follow him, he crossed the threshold.

"I really do not know how I can ever sufficiently thank you" rejoined the Sultan "for the magnanimous confidence you have reposed in me. Not a hair of your head can be touched before life should be extinct in my body. I beseech you to accept my very humble hospitality in my tent to-morrow. Of what value would all my riches and Royal splendours be, if I could not honour my most worthy benefactor. I would adore you as my preceptor and worship you as the God of my adoration."

"Never trouble yourself about these things." replied Bhim Singh "There should exist no longer any formalities between us."

They reached the foot of the hill. Alauddin made a low bow, which Bhim Singh returned. The Rajput Prince turned his back to ascend the steps. But alas! the next instant, a band of Tartar warriors fell upon him. The Rajputs at the 'Suryadwar' rushed down in a body as hungry lions from the den. But, it was too late. Bhim Singh was overpowered and hurried away a prisoner to the muhammadan camp, in a crack of fingers!

The Sultan despatched a letter intimating that he would set free the Prince, if Padmini Bai should be surrendered to him. Great was the consternation felt in the Royal abode. Padmini and Gora Singh, after deep consideration, sent a reply to the Sultan.

"To His Highness, Sultan Alauddin.—I, Gora Singh, the chief secretary to the Royal House of Mewar, am directed by her ladyship, Padmini Bai, to communicate to you her intentions. Her ladyship considers it her paramount duty to undergo any hardship to secure the liberty of her lord. She has, therefore, decided to join your camp to-morrow at this hour. You shall, of course, have withdrawn all your forces from the trenches. A number of ladies of the superior chieftains of Mewar would accompany her ladyship to pay their last respects, besides a retinue of the maids-of-honour, who are to follow her ladyship to Delhi. Seven hundred litters have been provided for the conveyance of the galaxy of ladies. I shall have

the high honour of escorting the Princess to your camp and no male adult should accompany except the litter-bearers. You will kindly issue the strictest orders to prevent curiosity from violating the sanctity of the Rajput female dignity and privacy. Her ladyship places entire confidence in your Royalty!"

With the best regards,

I remain,

Gora Singh.

The Sultan read the letter over and over. He was bathed, as it were, in a fount of blissful joy on the prospective realisation of his sweetest dream. He thought her beauty was ten thousand times more winning and more fascinating than what he had heard about. He ordered his troopers to withdraw instantaneously from the trenches and encamp at a respectable distance. The richest tents of silk were accommodated for the beautiful Princess and her ladies and walls of cloth provided around. His own pavilion was removed to a distance of a hundred yards.

It was two in the noon. The reverberating sounds of the martial 'nagaras' or the grand kettle drums of Mewar, actually rent the skies. The doors of the 'Suryadwar' were thrown open. A row of litters of a fine blue colour, with the windows closed, each borne by six people, could be seen entering the gate. Alauddin was seated in a stately chair in his tent facing the Chittore gate

surrounded by his choicest soldiers. The litters, as they emerged in a continuous line, resembled a swarm of majestic tortoises, a train of sturdy elephants and a row of the blackest cloudlets. After a while, there issued forth in high stately dignity, a grand palanquin of striking beauty, over the windows of which, the gayest curtains were drawn. A formidable chieftain, attired in the most tasteful costume, rode by its side. The horse was tall and of a strong build. He exhibited all the finest traits of his purest breed. He seemed however, a little restless under the rider, who seemed not well accustomed to him. The guards at the gate made the most obedient salutations as the palanquin came near them. Soon, other litters followed.

The Sultan recognised the grand litter of Padmini Bai. "I have won her—" he mused in a half audible tone. "She shall be mine in a few minutes. I will attend to her slightest wants and surround her with all the worthy things that riches and kingly power can supply. I will, if need be, make her rosy cheeks even still redder with my heart's blood."

The litters reached the foot of the hill. Some were borne to the imperial tents, while a greater number were conducted to the special tents reserved for the Princess. Gora Singh advanced to the imperial quarters and was courteously received by the Sultan. He informed that Padmini Bai coveted a parting interview with her Royal husband before

she could leave for Delhi. Alauddin granted a quarter of an hour's time and sent Bhim Singh. The Rajput Prince reached the sweet tents. After an exchange of a few explanations with Gora Singh, he mounted the horse, which jumped over the walls of cloth and in a few minutes he was seen dashing along the steps towards the fort. Loud were the cries of 'bhaga—bhaga-Bhim Singh!' The very same instant, the devoted band of defenders of Chittore, clad in their choicest steel panoplies, emerged from the litters and with the greatest impetuosity rushed upon the imperial camp. But Alauddin was more than well guarded. He ordered an immediate pursuit. The Rajput Prince had, by this time, gained his way to the fort and within a wink, the grand portals of the 'Suryadwar' were closed behind him.

The heroes of Chittore rushed to ascend the steps leading to the fort. They were badly attacked from behind. After a sharp fight, a large number gained the gate from where they challenged the Tartars to the fight. Thousands of the Khilji warriors ran up to them. The Rajputs had the better advantage of standing on a higher level. Gora Singh reaped a bumper harvest of the enemy. Badul, a lad of twelve, the son of Gora Singh, consumed the forest of the enemy into ashes like a tremendous fire. Many a great warrior fell on the Khilji side.

The Sun shone with a face, red with rage, as if disgusted with the doings of the Khiljis and soon

sank in the bosom of the western horizon. With faces, radiant with triumph, and with the noblest sentiments and feelings at having accomplished the deliverance of their Prince and preserved the honour of their Princess, the Rajput heroes entered the capital amidst hearty congratulations and thundering applauses. Grand and pompous were the public rejoicings that were celebrated.



PADMA.



"The two great elephants of stone with the two resolute warriors sitting on them do, at the first entry into the fortress, make an impression of, I know not, what greatness and awful terror."

'Bernier.'

Such was the impression made on a Persian historian, a century after the statues were erected at one of the principal gates of Delhi. But to the present-day-visitor the charm would be far more powerful. Akbar, the Great Mogul, had these statues erected and mounted huge elephants in honour of the gallant Prince, Putta of Kailwa (a boy of sixteen) and Jaimal, a veteran commander of the Rajputs in Mewar, who fought with him during the memorable siege of Chittore in 1568 and gave an extraordinary proof of their immeasurable valour and unlimited capacity. The annals of Mewar abound in such worthy examples and the reader will be highly impressed while going through an account of one of such thrilling events.

Mewar was in the height of her glory in the sixteenth century and Chittore enjoyed the high honour of being her regal residence. The muhammadian monarchs of Delhi were strongly attracted by the splendour and resources of this ancient seat of civilisation. Akbar, made elaborate preparations in 1567 to siege and demolish this

great fort. Udai Singh, the ruling Prince of Mewar, wanting in a martial virtue, had fled to the Aravali mountains and hidden himself with the Gohils for some time before the mogul armies entered Mewar.

But Chittore lacked not brave defenders. Her name had a magical attraction. Sahidas, the chief of Saloombra, at the head of a great number of Chondawuts was at his post—the gate of the Sun. Rawut Dooda of Madaria led the sons of Sanga. The feudatory chiefs of Baidla and Kotario, the Pramara of Bijoli and the Jhala of Sadri inspired their contingents with their own brave examples. The Sonegurra Rao of Jhalore, Eswaradas Rahtore, Karamchand Cutchwaha and the Tuar Prince of Gualior were there to defend Chittore or die for her.

Sahidas, the chief of Saloombra, was the great Premier and commander-in-chief of the Rajput forces of Mewar. The Rajputs represented him as the Ulyses of the host; brave, skilful and intrepid in battle; wise, deliberate and accurate in counsel. He was highly revered by all the vassal chiefs of Rajasthan.

The mogul armies marched against Mewar in overwhelming numbers and surrounded Chittore. The unhappy siege lasted for many months. The besiegers and the besieged were equally exhausted. Tons and tons of gunpowder heaped up in deep trenches and set ablaze, were of no avail before the impregnable walls of the strong fort. On the

last day, the mogul sovereign sprang up a mine under the wall near the outer gate. The mine exploded with terrible noise and the citadel shook, as it were, to its very foundations. The shattered wall had a semi-circular opening into the fortress. The besiegers rushed into the breach in their hundreds and thousands. The chieftains of Baidla and Kotario, with their followers, defended the breach and repelled many assaults. The bravest fell on both sides. Eswaradas, Dooda Singh, and Karamchand, gloriously mounting over the heaps of corpses, fought and reached 'Veera swarga'. Minute by minute the battle was raging more and more terrible. Sahidas, inspiring his contingents with his personal brave example, jumped into the trench and mowed down the heads of the foes. He drew after him the brunt of the battle and the whole world beheld, with amazement, his glorious departure to the other world. The operations in the battle were stayed for a while.

It was a time-honoured custom in Mewar that, when a chief of Saloombra fell in a battle, the command should not devolve upon any other, however high his valour and status might be, until the last incumbent of his House had been exhausted. The command now devolved upon Putta of Kailwa. He was only sixteen. His father fought bravely and fell in the last sack. His mother, a fearless lady, reared this, her sole heir. Putta's marriage had been celebrated two days before. This was the third, the day of

the 'Nakabali'. Numerous articles of earthenware were decorated and placed in the marriage Hall. Thousands of beautiful ladies of the aristocratic houses thronged around. Putta, with his beautiful bride, Padma, was seated in the middle. On their foreheads shone the diamond coronets (emblems of marriage). The 'purohit' was reciting the 'Veda mantras'. The venerable ladies of the priest-hood were swinging around the bride and the bridegroom gold plates with lighted torches, singing marriage carols.

A military commandant rushed to the gate of the Hall. "Accept my profound respects, my lord!" he submitted, inclining his plumed head, "It would sorely afflict me to have had to disturb you amidst the sacred and happy proceedings."

The sudden appearance of the military officer and his ominous expression produced an excited sentiment throughout the assemblage and all the fair countenances became stern and blank. "Feel not any regret," exclaimed Putta, with an animation in his face "Welcome would be your presence. But what news did you bring?"

"Pardon me! my lord," observed the officer, "A portion of the outer gate of the fort has been blown up and terrible is the fight now. The great Saloombra Chief rushed to the breach followed by his lion-like Chondawut warriors and offered thousands to his broad sword. He ploughed down the battle field, deep with his sword and fell."

"The world had never seen before, his equal" ejaculated Putta "and splendidly had he conducted himself. As a member of the illustrious House, to which he belonged, I know my duty. I would lead the Sesodia squadrons at 'Suryadwar'. Hasten to the field and before many minutes elapse, the Tartars should taste the sweets of my ponderous weapon." The commandant bowed and departed.

A sensation of terrible awe and utter bewilderment reigned through the Hall. "Revered mother! "observed Putta" the war-sounds are sweeter than the vedic recitals of the high Priest and the melodious sounds of the marriage music. My heart is thrilled with ecstasy at the very utterance of the 'war'. Permit me to guard the 'Suryadwar' and bless me." So saying he knelt before her."

"My lad!" she said, highly gratified at his heroic bearing, "conduct yourself worthy of the fair name of Kailwa. Lead on the Sesodia clans and plant the crimson banner of the Sun in the heart of the enemy. I will examine and test your actions in the field. Remember, to die valorously is to live for ever. You must win laurels from the enemy." She then blessed him, extending her hands.

"Good mother!" exclaimed Putta," I owe a sacred duty to the Saloombra Chief, whom I have now succeeded. I know my sacred duty to Bappa Rao and to the Rajput nation. I know my sacred duty to your goodself, and lastly to Mother Mewar,

the heaven of my heart. I know no fear. Rest assured, mother! your son would rather cheerfully part with his life than bring discredit to the most renowned House, that gave him birth." He touched the feet of his mother and applied the hand to his eyes.

"Revered sisters!" he addressed the ladies, "I thank you all for your endearing sentiments towards me. Glories and pleasures in the world shine brightest when viewed from a distance. But they are shallow. I must immediately respond to the country's call. I should try to fill every moment of my life with some noble action. I bow to you."

Putta went home and very soon dashed to the gate. Rallied round by the Rajput warriors, he fell upon the enemy like a thunderbolt and worked havoc in their thick ranks. The Moguls fell back stupefied and appalled at his dexterous attack.

"Rise up, Padma!" observed the amazonian heroine, advancing with a firm and dignified step. "It is high time that I should tarry here. Putta has gone in advance. I must rush on to meet him in the field, if alive, or in the other world, if otherwise. If you like, you may accompany me. The world is nothing to a Rajpatni without her husband."

Padma rose from her seat. "Good mother!" she said "the Pramara House, to which I have the honour to belong, has not as yet produced a

coward. Even the tenderest Rajput babe from the womb will, on hearing the battle cry, spring forth roaring like a lion and fall upon the enemy! Oh! how willingly do I follow you! I should, with a smiling face, face the mouth of the cannon and allow my body blown up into a thousand fragments, in order to maintain the Rajput glory and the independence of Mewar."

"Well said, my daughter!" exclaimed the mother, "Let us proceed to the armoury."

Padma was only twelve and was lovely like the lily. Her limbs were tender. Her eyes were broad and lustrous and her cheeks smooth and bright. Her brow was well-shaped. Her countenance was full of artless simplicity. The various diamond ornaments on her body and the sweetest oleander flowers, plunged profusely into the dark tresses, enhanced the elegance of her personal beauty and the exquisite marriage apparel in yellow added much to her already fascinating features.!

"Beloved sisters!" exclaimed Padma, her face bright with sunny smiles, "I will earnestly request all of you to extend a hearty send-off to me on the sacred duty to fight at the gate of the Sun. Life itself loses all its charms, if a Rajput bride sits quiet at home when the lord of her heart engages himself in fighting! Let me fervidly thank the Almighty God for having presented to me a precious opportunity to add what little valour my tender hand can exhibit in

the sacred cause of the Mother country. Shower your choicest blessings on me."

She bowed. The parting scene was indeed deeply touching and afflicting. With moistened eyes, the high-born ladies embraced the heroic girl.

The mother and the daughter wore the choicest panoplies and armed themselves with scabbards. Myriads of ladies followed them through the streets. Both rode fast to the gate of the Sun, where they beheld the war-charger of Putta trotting over the breast plates of the dead Mogul cavaliers. The enemy had fallen there like leaves of trees before a strong gale. Putta was the midday Sun in the battle-sky! Thousands were the heads that flew to the sky like so many rubber balls. May his glory live long!

The lovely Padma, soft like the Lily, docile like the fawn and tender like the lotus fibre, was more than a burning cannon ball. She looked like a terrible lioness and she was the fiery 'Brahmmasthra' to the eye of the enemy! She hunted the Tartar warriors and many were the steel-clad breasts through which her lance penetrated. The superb grandeur of her extraordinary gallant bearing inspired the Rajput contingents with courage and immersed the rival forces in an Ocean of terror. On rushed the muhammadan warriors. High in the air flew their weapons and were scattered over the ground. The Delhi-troops could not withstand the dexterous onslaught of the heroic girl and fled like a herd of the frightened deer!

The mother was even more terrible than 'Mahishasura-mardani' in her revengeful mood! The Moguls, though fell in large numbers, yet were numerous and pressed on with great weight. After a desperate fighting for over three hours, the three laid their bodies on the huge heap of the rival corpses and slept a sleep from which they never awoke. The Mogul armies were far exhausted and the battle stopped for the day.

History is not poor. It can advance and spin any number of incidents and events. None can refuse to give the palm to these three personages. The names of Putta, Padma and the mother are the most familiar house-hold words in Mewar and will be honoured as long as the Rajput retains a shred of his inheritance or a spark of his ancient recollections!



JODHA BAI.



Bhagawandas of Amber was the first among the Princes of Hindusthan, who bestowed his daughter on Akbar. Man Singh, his brother's son was appointed a commander of the Mogul empire.

Man Singh was highly courageous. He would, with the utmost impetuosity, enter upon an action and could sweep everything in his precipitous course as if he were a mountain cataract. He became the most formidable of all the one thousand and six hundred commanders of the empire.

Assam and Orissa were conquered. Guzrat was finally annexed. The mere mention of his name struck terror into the hearts of the Afghans. Kandahar trembled under the tremendous roar of this heroic lion. Deccan was humbled and Berar and Khandesh were subjugated.

Akbar despatched multitudinous armies against Cashmere but the sturdy hill tribes slaughtered them to a man. The emperor sounded Man Singh, who, with twenty five thousand Cutchwaha horse, marched against the hill tribes. The foes fled leaving the forts undefended. Raja Man left his lieutenants in the country and was returning. Akbar advanced seven miles to greet him and he lavished the richest gifts on him.

The mighty Cutchwaha general conducted wars, for nearly a quarter of a century, with the patriot Prince, Pratap Singh of Mewar. He acted as the supreme dictator in the plot to alter the succession in favour of Khusru in preference to Selim, in which affair most of the ministers and a majority of nobles joined. Unable to withstand his irresistible influence, the emperor tried to remove him through poison. But when the delicious dishes were placed before him, Akbar presented the harmless one to the Rajput and by mistake, partook of the fatal one himself. Man Singh, however, brought round his colleagues and enthroned Selim after his father.

Jahangir completed his formidable preparations to invade Mewar and sent word to Raja Man to come from Bengal and assist him. The Cutchwaha did not respond. The emperor again despatched his favourite officers to request him to come to Allahabad, where, he himself would await his arrival. Man Singh came and when the emperor hinted at the topic, he expressed his regret. Jahangir insisted that he should oblige him. The intrepid veteran sternly replied that all the valorous exploits he had accomplished, were done through his free will, that from the moment his eyes saw the first rays of the Sun on the soil of the glorious Hindusthan, no mortal had ever dared to command him against his will and that if he was pressed, he would and should proceed to Mewar, not to humble the Maharana, but to kneel at his sacred feet and implore forgiveness for

his past actions. The great Mogul was bewildered and begged to be excused.

Raja Man died in 1615, ten years after the demise of his patron, Akbar and Deccan had the unique honour of preserving the bones of this celebrated hero of the age in her bowels.

Bahu Singh succeeded his father but he was destitute of the prominent characteristics of a Rajput. He spent his time and riches on elephant fights and horse races. He passed away in 1521, unmourned, unsung and unwept.

Maha Singh ascended the throne. But he was wanting in martial capacity and was addicted to dissipated habits. He did not survive long after his accession and left no issue.

In the centre of the magnificent gardens in the heart of Delhi, there stood a lofty building of stupendous structure, the regal abode of the Mogul emperors, with all its stately saloons, palatial Halls and numerous out-houses, commanding the most picturesque sceneries. A sumptuously furnished saloon stood to the west exhibiting superior architecture. The floor was covered with rich carpets and the many windows were equipped with velvet draperies. The tables were of the superior rose-wood and mirrors of full size, set up in gold frames and mounted on elegant stands, stood in many places. Pictures of artistic perfection were hung on the walls. Handsome vases of the sweetest scents and oils emitted forth fragrances from the almyrahs. Exquisite specimens

of gold and silver jewellery lay scattered on a table near them. On a raised platform approachable by three steps, there stood a highly decorated ottoman with the soft curtains of gold brocade adorned by mother-of-pearls.

On the soft downs over the stately ottoman, was reclining a lady of an extraordinary beauty. Her forehead was high and open and exhibited the supreme eminence of her intellectuality. Her marvellously beautiful countenance, without the mark of the pure musk, surpassed the Moon in its graceful elegance. Her large dark eyes were sparkling with the melting voluptuousness. Her radiant side-long looks were mischievously noble. Her brows were admirably arched and her nose was straight and spotlessly beautiful. Her damask cheeks were very handsome. A soft smile often played between her well-shaped moist lips which even the lotus lit by the sun beams, might have envied. The elegance of her soft swan-like neck was unrivalled. Her shoulders were high and gracefully sloped towards her beautifully modelled bust. The folds of her luxuriant dark hair wore the sweetest jasmynes. Her apparel was of dark velvet, well suited for her superlatively fair complexion. She wore a necklace and ear-rings of superior diamonds. To the folds of the flowing garment on her bosom was stuck a breast-pin embellished with gems. The creator must have mixed together the softness of the blossoms, the sweetness of the nectar and the cream of the

moon and made her beauteous limbs. So noble and so winning were her graces that she seemed more than fitted to be the senior most Queen of the greatest emperor. In a word, she was invincible in charms. Such was Nur-Jahan, the magnetic sweet partner of Nouruddin Muhammad Jahangir.

The senior maid of honour announced the arrival of the emperor. The Queen alighted from the couch and received him. They took their seats on the platform.

"Your majesty is extremely kind to me," observed the Queen—her refulgent face shedding a flood of lustre so as to immerse the monarch in its luminous depths. "My joy knows no bounds in your lovely company and I dare swear that this is an indisputable fact."

"Even as indisputable as I love you from the very first moment I saw you," replied the sovereign. "Your exalted image is never for an instant absent from my heart. Your sweet presence is my sunny paradise."

"I should have deemed myself most fortunate" rejoined the empress, flinging a look full of melting fondness—"if I had been blessed with uninterrupted enjoyment of your gracious company. But, I know millions of souls like me are to be looked after by your majesty."

"I am extremely indebted to you" exclaimed the emperor "and I would have spent the whole of this day with you, had not the matter of the succession of Amber engaged me. There is one

Jai Singh. There are Gajendra Singh and his son Umra Singh, the Princes of Marwar. Who knows how many more?

"The line of Man Singh is extinct". said Nur Jahan—"Jai Singh is but a very distant relation. The Princes of Marwar have practically no claims. Your imperial majesty had espoused the sister of Man Singh and she left Purvez after her. Purvez becomes the proper heir to the throne of Amber, as the nephew of Man Singh. Your majesty will be, on the one hand, providing him with a fitting situation and on the other, fulfilling a sacred duty to the departed Meena Bai."

"Nothing is more true than what your ladyship observed". responded Jahangir, with a sublime impression on his countenance. "But I am afraid the world should think that I broke my own laws and overlooked the claims of the Rajputs blinded by filial considerations. Yet, will I value your ladyship's opinion to the extent it ought Now I take leave."

"Mine, of course, is a casual suggestion" added the Queen.

The Padusha, inclining his head to the resplendent beauty, walked away with a stately step and entered another sumptuously equipped apartment. The maids in attendance made their salutations. A superbly beautiful lady, attired in a plain costume, greeted and conducted him towards the cushioned seats on the platform.

"Forgive me my dearest!" observed the emperor "for the delay in paying the morning visit."

"Proffer not excuses, my lord," replied the high-born lady "I have every confidence in your majesty's best feelings towards me and would never wound your majesty's tender heart over these petty things. Oh! know you not how sweet the reunion should be after the separation? I enshrine your majesty's image in my heart of hearts and always feel happy and contented."

"Most adorable Jodha Bai!" exclaimed the great Mogul, with a face beaming with admiration, "Your ladyship is virtue and large-heartedness. I am to decide the question of the succession of Amber to-day. Nur Jahan favoured me with her opinion. I seek your own worthy counsel before I finally dispose of the matter."

"My knowledge in the administrative affairs is very limited," responded Jodha Bai. "Men always ought to love truth and justice dearer than any other thing. Aspire to possess godly qualities which enhance your majesty's fame. Nothing in this world, is more worthy than impartiality of justice. The present case is an easy one and stands solved in itself."

"I give the highest honour to your ladyship's advice," rejoined the emperor. "Jai Singh and Umra of Marwar are contesting—to be more candid. Purvez also has come forward with his claims, I am perplexed to arrive at the just decision."

"If the choice were left to me," observed the Princess "I would certainly favour Jai Singh. He is the most legal heir. The Princes of Marwar are not at all justified in their claims. Your majesty should overlook Purvez. Then only the world would ring with the great fame of Jahangir Padusha, who upholds Justice even in preference to his own off spring. Always try to please God first."

The great Mogul was deeply impressed with the magnanimity of her high-mindedness. He ordered for writing materials which, the next instant, were there.

Immediately a number of Princes and chieftains entered the great Hall and after paying their homage to the King and the Queen, took their seats.

"Exalted Princes and distinguished chieftains!" addressed the emperor "I have deeply considered over the question of the succession of Amber in all its vital aspects and have just arrived at a conclusion. All due deference be rendered to the glory of the Almighty God, by whose blessings I have been enabled to decree that Prince Jai Singh hereby be declared as the proper heir to the gadi of Man Singh and that hence forward he will and shall rule the principality of Amber with absolute rights and hereditary powers of government, acknowledging the suzerainty of Delhi. He will maintain the dignity of his vassal, chieftains and uphold the sanctity of the mosques and the Hindu

temples. He will preserve the perpetual friendship and unity of interests with Delhi."

Tremendous was the applause that arose in the assemblage. The high steward took the imperial firman with both the hands and approached Jai Singh. The Prince stood and received the order.

"Allow me to proffer my heart-felt gratitude to your majesty," submitted Jai Singh "for the honour conferred upon me. I shall conduct myself with wisdom and propriety and serve the empire to the best of my ability and integrity. I pray for your majesty's continued kindness towards me." He bowed.

"It is not to me" hastily intervened the Padusha "that you owe your gratitude. It is her gracious ladyship Jodha Bai, who is solely instrumental in bringing about this situation. You will therefore offer your salaam to her ladyship."

"The customs of Rajwarra are sacred and divine," replied Jai Singh, in a dignified tone. "Though it was my proud House that in the first instance led the way by bestowing her daughters on the Tartar family, yet it was deemed by us not as a source of honour but only as a stigma of the blackest type. I am bound to uphold the pedigree of the Cutchwaha House and the glory of the Rajput race. I am therefore constrained to submit that it is contrary to the religious customs of a Rajput to salaam a lady married to a Musلمان however high her status in life might be. I might, with more felicity, be

ordered to do this honour to any lady of your Tartar family and I most willingly obey. I would however sternly refuse to make a salaam to Jodha Bai though the high eminence of her ladyship's worthy character is universally acknowledged."

The Padusha was rudely shocked by the proud delivery of the Rajput Prince and he looked blank for a moment. All the chieftains felt bewildered and dismayed. A pin might have been heard to fall then in the Hall. No one knew what would happen next.

"Prince Jai Singh!" said Jodha Bai, filling the Hall with the sweet cadences of her melodious voice. "I quite rejoice at the lofty dignity of your Rajput character. I feel immensely proud that the nation to which I belong, could have produced a specimen so splendid! Indeed heroes are heroes! God has stamped kingdom on your head. With undiminished favour and increasing pleasure do I present you with the kingdom of Amber. Rule it and add name and fame to the celebrated Cutchwaha House. God bless you with great prosperity and posterity."

The utterance of the magnanimous Jodha Bai produced the most sublime impression on all in the assemblage and Jahangir himself felt astonished and blissfully relieved.

"Most revered Queen!" submitted Jai Singh "I have insulted the worthiest ornament of womanhood. I have committed a fault. Your ladyship's natural generosity and resourceful magnanimity have humbled me and I should

certainly strive to mend my impetuous bearing. A virtuous heart knows no resentment, but glows with mercy uninterrupted. A noble disposition knows no offence. Your ladyship showers the choicest favours at all times on all, just as the glorious moon sheds her soothing rays on the blooming lake and the hissing snake alike. Angels could not have acted better. It is really an incomparable pleasure to receive the blessing of the worthiest lady of the age. Your ladyship has enhanced the sanctity of the Rajput race and purified the Mogul nation. Good mother! I kneel before you and implore your pardon." He went down upon his knees with profound respect.

"Rise up, Prince of the Cutchwahas!" exclaimed the good-natured lady, with a gentle smile, "You have never committed any offence. You are beyond any unworthy sentiment."

The Hall reverberated with happy applauses and hearty congratulations to Jai Singh. The amiable Jodha Bai was praised by all. After the distribution of gifts, the assemblage rose.

Jai Singh restored the Cutchwaha House to its former greatness. He served the empire for a very long time and was considered the ablest commander under Aurangzeb. It was his dexterous hand that successfully took Sivaji to Delhi. His kingdom grew in extent and twenty two vassal chieftains served under him.

What benign specimens of chivalry, dignity, piety and faith are Singh and Bai.

PANNA BAI.



"I am immensely pleased to have received an intimation," said, one day, Vikramajit, the monarch, brought back to the throne of Mewar by Humayun, addressing the nobles and vassal chieftains in the grand court Hall at Chittore, "from the Portuguese general at Surat, promising he would send any number of musketeers, well experienced in the use of the firearms. He added, he would place at my disposal an enormous quantity of ammunition. I have ordered for the service of ten thousand armed infantry. A major portion of the troublesome cavalry can thus safely be dispensed with."

There was a general start. Horror was depicted on every countenance! Even a bolt from the Blue would have been more coolly and calmly received! Was it not a fatal aim at the Rajput chivalry?

"Allow me to submit" exclaimed Karamchand, the elderly chieftain of Ajmir, "that disastrous had been the sufferings the country experienced after the advent of the foreign artillery, last year. The whole Rajput nation, from the proudest Premier down to the poorest ploughman, felt it as a downright insult. It would be highly chivalrous of your Highness to examine all

resources and enhance the martial capacity of the country in quality and quantity. Pray, do not bring in foreigners. I speak this on my behalf and on behalf of the nobles present here."

"Dare you to interrupt me, scoundrell!" howled Vikramajit. "You have grown old and your brains should have deserted you. Why! I never find a whit of nobility in all of you — the so-called nobles. I am quite disgusted with your worthless cavalry. Keep aloof, old fool! and put a stop to your unwanted counsel."

"Pray, do not be so vehement and pungent in your remarks, sire!" calmly expostulated Karamchand, "My advice, ripe with years, was deemed worthy by your parent, Sangram Singh, a more magnanimous monarch than whom, the world is yet to behold. It would not look happy that your Highness should treat the vassals with derision and impudence. We are here to serve the Ruler with fidelity in days of peace and shed our blood in time of war. Your Highness might even strike us on the back but should not cripple our shoulders — tear our hearts. We are the children of the soil."

"I am all the more irritated at your arrogant tone." vociferated the king. "Why should I strike you on the back when you defied my authority with your execrable tongue? I should certainly strike you in the face." He pounced upon Karamchand and dealt a severe blow on the face. "You are a veritable plague to the court," he continued "Wag not your mischievous tail, parasite! I would

cut you in twain. Take yourself off! Vultures and kites will, ere long, take care of you."

Ah, what a push! ... The aged chieftain staggered back for a second under the rash push; but the next instant, recovered his ground. He stood stupefied and stunned. Every one in the Hall was struck with the sorest affliction and consternation. The most uncontrollable feelings were ablaze in a moment. All the eyes turned towards Kanak Singh (Kanji) of Saloombra, the great Chondawut Premier.

"Duty prompts me to intervene." interposed Kanak Singh, in his stentorian voice, rising from his seat, "Happy the land, where the sovereign comprehends that, by the right of birth, he is not superior to any vassal chieftain or any loyal subject and feels exalted at taking the time by the forelock to serve his fellow-men and the country. In the multitudinous family of a country, the monarch holds only the senior membership — the nobles and the chiefs are his brothers — and the millions of the subjects are his children. Karamchand is an experienced and wise veteran chief, having served the country for over half a century with the most enviable record-glory. By insulting him, your Highness has mortally wounded the whole Rajput nation. Sorry, you could not see this much! Did the history of a country ever blacken its pages before, with an outrage so repugnant and detestable? I would, therefore, strongly urge that your Highness should offer the sincerest apologies just

to secure his whole-hearted forgiveness, before matters take a serious turn. He is no king who has no conception of duty!" Turning to the chief of Ajmir, he said "Ah! Karamchand! is this all to you, whose hair grew grey in the service of the Maharanas!"

"Dare you to dictate terms?" growled Vikramajit, with rage. "You should know I care very little for the nasty feelings of all of you, nobles! I am the sole master here and you are all my sworn servitors. You, perhaps, presume that you are the great celestials, endowed with super-human powers, just dropped down from the blissful heights! I would trample down all these haughtinesses and disobediences under my foot. Be off — I do now dismiss the court."

"I am sorry that matters are now taking an unhappy turn." remonstrated the Saloombra, "It is unjust and uncanny that you should treat the well-meant advice, with such contempt, especially as it comes from me. I am the first and the foremost of the subjects and have the unique hereditary honour of being called the 'great ancient' and the 'wise elder' of Mewar. Do you forget so soon that, unless I volunteer myself to serve you, you cannot, for a moment, exercise an atom of authority over me? — much less over my country? Do not you remember that, the very instant, you step out of the 'Suryadwar', your authority ceases and the control over the capital — the palace — and the seraglio devolves upon my head and shoulders by

virtue of the sacred laws of the country? Can you shut up the world from the fact that whatsoever grants, you might propose to make, should only be null and void unless and until I affix the monogram of my lance on its back? Is it not widely known throughout the land that I, a name-sake conventional servant, am the king-maker of the Sesodia House, the most sacred and the most ancient of all the Royal Houses not only of India but of the whole world? By my own hand the sovereigns are girt with the sword and from me they receive the mark of inauguration on their accession to the throne. I lead, by right, the van in the battle. It is beyond dispute that I am endowed with exemplary and extraordinary powers yes powers superior to all of your Royal prerogatives put together! Yet, I beseech you to think calmly over the intricate situation. There is yet room for conciliation. Do not forego this precious chance. Why do you plunge headlong in the Cimmerian darkness?"

The great chief stood drawing up his magnificent form to its full stature, enhancing his personal glory to its highest eminence — the dense cluster of the richest plumes over his head gracefully and serenely waving forward and backward, adding majestic dignity to his highly commanding demeanour. The most brilliant specimen of the heroic Rajput nobility was then adored by one and all present in the Hall. They were all thrilled to ecstasies.

"Your haughtiness knows no bounds, then!" pealed forth the Rana, in a tone of pomposity, "I do hereby withdraw all your powers, if at all any, of which you are boasting. I would rather annihilate the country than tender an apology to a mean mortal. Perdition on you! and on your perfidious name! Get away, wretch! Tarry but a minute longer You will be made to congratulate Karamchand!"

"Can't you curb your indecent bearing?" admonished Kanak Singh, in a stern voice. "Grow not more obstinate — more incorrigible. I am now giving you the last chance. I have already given you the longest rope. If you won't mend yourself, I will have to end yourself!"

"Stop your prating," exploded Vikramajit, "Dare you threaten me? It is high time that you should be allowed to stand on your legs. What, ho! my musketeers! take charge of this traitor fool of a Salcombra."

Complete silence reigned in the Hall. If a stranger had been introduced, he would have taken all of them for statues for a while.

"We are unwilling to continue under the diabolical rule of this hellish hound raise hands," rang forth the trumpet voice of the Salcombra, thus removing the spell on all.

"All of us without a single exception. Down with the blasphemous Vikramajit. Bravo! Salcombra! God be with us" were the uproarious and hilarious responses that burst forth from every lip

and at the same time hundreds of hands rose high as terribly for Vikramajit as if the tongues of volcanic lava from the bowels of the earth! Vikramajit was but a tiny spark and the great Saloombra a powder magazine! The court was fierily animated at the turn of the events.

"I should say you must be going mad," wheezed despairingly Vikramajit. "What the devil you mean by creating all these disloyal scenes before your very sovereign?"

"Brother-chieftains and worthy countrymen!" addressed the great Premier, in a clarion voice, "you are seeing how Vikramajit is behaving. It is his high-handedness that was mainly instrumental in bringing about the disastrous sack of Chittore by Bahadur and indescribable were the horrors and the losses the country sustained then. He has grown more tyrannical and brought matters to an irretrievable crisis. It is high time the country should put up with this monster. So, by virtue of the extraordinary privileges and statutory rights and powers vested in me, I, Kanak Singh, the rightful representative of the great Chondawat House of Saloombra, do, hereby, declare that Vikramajit, son of the late Maharana Sangram Singh, through his insolent and overbearing conduct towards the dutiful chieftains and faithful subjects, has, this day — this hour, forfeited all legal and moral claims whatsoever to the throne of Mewar and he, this moment, has stood before you, the loyal countrymen, dethroned. Now, with your good wishes, I take

charge of the entire administration of the realm with the supreme control over the throne, the palace etc. I would, however, reserve, to myself, the right to appoint the successor in the near future."

Indescribable was the excitement felt by one and all at the sudden turn of the events so little anticipated. Whilst every heart was overwhelmed with astonishment, hurry, emotion, suspense, confusion and a multitude of varied and variegated sentiments, the great Saloombra chief whistled his superbly beautiful gold bugle, which sent forth its peculiar, clear, clarion, metallic peal resounding through the air and the next moment, marched through the grand portals, into the magnificent Hall of the Cæsars, a most splendidly drawn procession of five hundred stalwart warriors of the chivalrous Chondawat clan with drawn swords, all clad with the choicest panoplies, with the redoubtable Jagath Singh of Kailwa at their head. Observing complete silence and strict discipline, they advanced to the centre and made the most obedient salutations to Kanak Singh. The commander stepped forward a few paces and gracefully inclining his plumed head, stood at a respectful distance with his hands folded across the chest.

The sonorous metallic note from the bugle of the Saloombra chief, the sudden entry of the armed and armoured squadron and the presence of the veteran commander produced the deepest effect on the spectators and all were intoxicated with joy, wonder and excitement, which no human

language can possibly adequately depict. There were deafening ejaculations, cheers and acclamations.

"Silence." commanded Kanak Singh and turning to the commandant, said in a highly authoritative tone, "I, the chief of Saloombra, the representative of the Chondawut House, do, hereby, command you, Jagath Singh, the chieftain of Kailwa, now on guard duty at the Palace of Chittore, to take that yonder individual by name Vikramajit, into your custody, and keep him under the strictest vigilance, until further orders."

"Your gracious lordship's high commands shall be implicitly obeyed and executed." submitted Jagath Singh, in the most deferential tone, making a low bow of his plumed head. He walked towards the throne with a bold and measured tread.

"Fool! you have no business here. Dare you to lay hands upon your king?" burst forth the unfortunate Royal accused in a fit of the wildest rage.

"So am I directed." said Jagath Singh, in a firm tone. "Unquestionable and indisputable are the express commands of the all-powerful chief of Saloombra, the sole director and the mighty controller of Mewar. The sovereign and the servant, alike, should submit to his august authority in emergencies! I am the faithful servant come here to put his gracious lordship's orders into execution. Get down, sir!" He extended his hands towards Vikramajit.

"Stand back, you, insolent rascal!" shrieked the entrapped Royal lion with a face extremely troubled and confused.

"Come down, at once, upon your knees. You are my prisoner," said Jagath Singh, in a tone grave and serious and brought Vikramajit down from the throne. The Royal prisoner gave a deep moan full of anguish and followed the veteran mechanically.

It would be difficult to convey an idea of the exact feelings that were uppermost in the hearts of the assembly. The climax was reached. No shouts — no ejaculations — no cries — no approvals — no murmurs! A wave of contentment soon paraded over the countenances of the nobles. Kanak Singh shone in all the splendour of his dignified stately stature, a gentle smile adorning his heroic countenance. He was heartily hailed by one and all as the saviour of Mewar and the assemblage broke for the day.

Kanak Singh, though with reluctance, installed, the next day, Vanaveer Das on the throne as the temporary sovereign of the country, as Udai Singh, the only heir to the Royal House, was but a lad of seven and would take some years before he could be of sufficient age to guide the destinies of the Sesodias. The chiefs and nobles left for their abodes, the following day.

Vikramajit was, one afternoon, seated in the "durrikhana" looking into some important papers. Vanaveer abruptly entered with four of his adhe-

rents and cleft his head into two with his sword. The alarming screams of the servants soon brought the ladies from the "Rawula." Bewilderment and sorrow prevailed. Tides of citizens inundated the Palace. The Purohit appeared and after the necessary preliminary ceremonial rites were gone through, preparations were in progress for the removal of the body.

The spacious saloon on the upper storey of the Palace was occupied by Panna Bai, the good natured nurse in charge of Udai Singh, a respectable Rajputni of the renowned Keechi tribe of the "Gogrown House." She was a rare specimen of beauty and virtue. She had just finished giving rice and milk to Udai Singh and her son, a boy of the same age and was lulling the children. A senior servant entered the apartment and respectfully bowed to her.

"I have just dropped in, madam!" he submitted in a low tone, "to intimate to you about an impending danger!"

"I apprehend, of course, something worse than that - I mean, the King's murder." sighed and murmured the nurse, in an excited tone, "Do not keep me in suspense. Tell me everything, Bari — everything, you know and suspect. I am already prepared for the worst."

"I believe the children have gone to sleep," rejoined the servant and confirming his conviction on the point, whispered "Vanaveer is determined to remove the remaining obstacle to his throne.

Tranquillise yourself and calmly ponder over the situation. You have but an hour's time before you."

Panna gave a pathetic start. "So, Bari! my worst fears are confirmed." She craved, "help — help. I am a foreigner to this place. I have none to assist me in this emergency. How can I tide over the crisis?"

"I have served you and the Prince for seven years with devotion." responded the servant, "You know I am sincere and incapable of any base sentiment. I pledge I would lay down my life at your feet. You are to guide and I am to follow."

"I know I can count on your help." observed Panna. "Attend to your work downstairs. I would try to manage matters, in the mean time. But, present yourself before me, the moment Vanaveer and his accomplices leave me."

"I obey you," said the Bari and left the Hall.

Panna was severely shocked with the horrible news. She felt her senses abandoning her. She sank into a seat near the children. It took some minutes before her thoughts grew calm.

"Some time would elapse before Vanaveer might make his appearance here," Panna revolved plans within herself, "Would it not be well for me to remove the children to a safer place. Once out of the capital, every succour might be commanded! But the old guards and the sentinels at the Palace were recently replaced by his confidants. If an escape is attempted, they might seize upon us. Pitch darkness envelopes the universe. It is cloudy and

drizzling. The children are fast asleep. It would be impossible for me to go away from the fort undetected and unpursued." She paused and the next moment, resumed "I am a Rajputni. How can I be timid? Should I not spring upon Vanaveer like a tigress and plunge a dexterous weapon deep into his breast? Can I save the Prince and rid the country of this monster? But, if Vanaveer brings a posse of his miscreants to commit the act, how should I then conduct myself? I can kill two, three or even four of the ruffians. One of them would certainly cry for help. The armed guards would rush in and overpower me in no time. So, this course too is hazardous. Then, should I leave Udai Singh to his fate and retire to my country with my son?" She gasped for a second and then continued "This is horrible — unthinkable — and most disloyal. The revered departed Karnavati put him, as a baby of one month, into my hands. I swore that I would preserve her Royal filial treasure. I nursed him. I tended him. I love him more than my son. He is my master. I must preserve the remnant of the glorious Ikshwaku-and-Mandhata dynasty. I should prove myself a true heroine. I must also live with him. ... not that life dear to me; but because Udai's life dearer to me! Udai Singh is an orphan. The only brother he possessed, lies down dead, this moment. He should not be cast to the winds as a disinherited forlorn child. I should stand in the place of mother father, brother and sister, friend, relation, servant and slave, to him. My son, though now a child,

when grown to manhood, must serve Udai Singh and be ready to meet death at any moment for his sake. He must sacrifice his life for his young master. Yes — I now very well remember how once a little finger, thrust into the hole of a dam by a lad, saved thousands of people from an imminent deluge-danger in the dead of night. Yes, he must die! My only consolation should be that my little darling could do a service and make a sacrifice that all the world's regiments could never have done to save their King! O God! Save my soul!"

A torrent of motherly feelings raged tumultuously in her breast and, the next moment, she burst into an ocean of tears. "Ah, sweetest and dearest son!" she sobbed, fixing a look of devoted fondness, "pardon me! O God save me — save me! Think me not cruel for an instant. I bore you for nine long months. Every muscle, every nerve, every bone, every fibre and every drop of blood in your tender body — mine! My darling! how brutal should it be to think ill of you!" She knelt by his side. She perceived a tremendous gulf beginning to open between her and her dearest. The afflictions of the whole world rushed into her fondest heart, and she was on the point of fainting. She heard stern voices downstairs. She jumped from the seat and hastily undressed the boys and exchanged their robes. She filled her son with the tenderest farewell kisses! "Alas! the villains with rascally smiles, red-hot with arrack, are racing, foaming and swearing" — groaned Panna.

"Stand aloof, Panna!" thundered Vanaveer, abruptly bursting into the apartment, followed by four of his servants. "Show me which of the two is Udai?"

"Alack, Udai Singh is my more than son," cried Panna, with pain in her tone, as the cruel words fell upon her ears as so many drops of molten lead. "The innocent child is sleeping. I implore your mercy. Pray, leave him. He is your majesty's brother."

"A stop to your nonsense and a truce to your obstinacy," howled Vanaveer, "All the Gods can never save him. Stand not in my way. I shall cut you down and do away with Udai Singh."

"For heaven's sake, be merciful," shrieked our frenzied heroine. "A woman kneels at your feet. Pray, let live the child! I would worship you throughout my life." She prostrated before him and kissed the dust of his feet.

"End this scene," roared Vanaveer terribly kicking her head off with his foot, "Rise, and show me Udai."

The half-mad Panna rose with the utmost effort. There was something awfully ominous and sinister in the rough tone and fierce look of the monster, which overawed her. She was as pale as death and stood crucified to the spot. A wild scream gushed up to her throat from the depths of her heart but she had not the strength to cry out. She raised her finger and pointed at her child on the carpet. Vanaveer examined him and the next

moment, Panna saw the murderous steel descend deep into the heart of her dearest son. Leaving instructions with one of the four, the assassin stalked away with the rest.

Panna Bai was a strong-hearted lady. She could have, with unflinching fortitude, stood before the booming red-hot iron ball from the fiery mouth of a disastrous cannon, to be blown up into a thousand fragments! She could have, with perfect ease, swum through the sea of molten lead and burning oil! She could have seated herself under an enormous heap of blazing cinders without the slightest move of the smallest muscle over her sunny countenance! She could have stood, without the least sign of pain, even if a thousand sharp daggers had pierced and torn her skin, muscles, nerves and fibres! She could have maintained the most cheerful demeanour if swarms of the most venomous cobras of the type of 'Karkotaka' had bitten and emptied into her veins all their venoms! She could have stood erect, without once winking the eye, if all the thunderbolts had fallen upon her head in a big mass! She could have withstood with philosophical calmness and fortitude the torture, even if vultures, with their iron beaks, had pricked and preyed upon her living skin! But, this was too much! Oh, how she wished the miscreant had plunged the dagger into her heart! In her bitterest agony, she felt the hell of a Hall terribly whirling. She was convulsed. The wildest shriek of "Ah, Udai Singh!" burst forth from her

lips, and the next second, she dropped down senseless on the floor.

Many minutes had elapsed before Panna began to recover herself. She opened her eyes and slowly raised herself into a sitting posture. The refulgent light of her eyes had gone. The heaven of her heart had turned into the most abominable hell! The focus of all her worldly affections and aspirations had become dimmed! The sweetest and the dearest angel from her bosom had been snatched away for ever! But, the halo round her head had the unearthly brightness of a thousand suns!

"The Maharana's orders are" said the servant "that you, Panna! should dispose of the remains of Udai Singh along with the body of Vikramajit and leave the capital forthwith as your services are dispensed with. I am directed to exercise the strictest vigilance over you." The ruffian left the Hall.

Panna rose and brought a big basket from the adjacent room. She spread some fragrant flowers and put Udai Singh into it. She thrust some leaves over him and adjusted the cover. "May Gods save you!" she prayed, kneeling before the basket. "May Heaven accept my sacrifice ---- a sacrifice, made enduring all the despairing mortal agonies of the whole world. May you live long and rule the Rajputs! May the chain of your race never snap! All happinesses and all successes to you!"

The faithful servant then entered the Hall. "Madam! I am ready." he said in a submissive tone, "Pray, issue your instructions."

"My instructions are very few, Baril" whispered the nurse, rising from the floor. "This basket contains the most precious treasure, which you and I must preserve at the risk of even our lives. Here, in the midst of these leaves, throbs the heart of our sovereign!"

"Then, gracious lady!" stammered the senior servant, with astonishment mingled with fear, sorrow and joy, "you have terribly — very terribly, sacrificed your — — —."

"Keep silence!" hushed Panna, raising the finger to her lip, "Speed on with this basket and wait in the rocky bed of the Beris to the west of the capital. I will join you before daybreak."

"Worthy lady!" complimented the Bari "you are an angel in the form of a woman. Inestimable is your sacrifice. I would always worship you." He touched her feet and applied the hands to his forehead. He then took the basket and walked away.

Dear reader! I am reluctant to make the wound, already inflicted by Vanaveer on your heart, deeper and wider. Panna's birth is no accident in India, where Savitri, Chandramati, Damayanti and Sita shone with so much lustre that even the Sun could not have faced the glare without the aid of the smoky lenses! "Oh, the mother's sacrifice!" — we cannot conceive it! The sacrifice is no mere

rhetorical, imaginary flourish of a pen or a tongue! — it is more than that! Even the sacrifice of all crowns, thrones and sceptres dwindles into insignificance in comparison! O Panna! you are there till the last nail is driven into the coffin! — that too your only child! Ah, how little these villains know that their play-grounds are only bottomless chasms, over which artificial lawns are raised of loose earth by Satan! Perhaps, your only philosophical consolation is that you are growing in heaven the store of your kith and kin in advance! Our only consolation is that your sacrifice eventually bloomed into Rana Pratap Singh — the world's greatest hero! Who else could have given us Pratap's father under such circumstances? Weep not, mother! — take heart! Your morning star has, only for the time being, sunk in the gem-set golden dawn! Ah, if the great Saloombra had remained in Chittore, this calamity could have been averted!

It is beyond the capacity of my tender heart to attempt to tell about all the excruciating agonies which Panna felt in attending to all the distressing ceremonial acts to complete which, she was compelled to remain in the fort for a few hours. Let me pass over the torturous scenes by simply recording, without going into details, that the remains of the child, the little and the great victim to fidelity, were consumed along with those of Vikramajit — the numberless ladies of the Palace wept and sobbed with inconsolable grief

over the supposed last and lost pledge of the illustrious Sangram ... Panna with the most sickening heart, carried herself in the depths of the extreme darkness of the horrible midnight through the secret gates, thorny bushes and pathless grounds in the fort and at last after an incessant toil of six hours, she descended the hill to the bed of the Beris. The darkest day had passed away. Once more, she received the homage of the servant. Her first act, however, was to open the basket and kiss the darling Prince, her only consolation!

The lady and the servant went to Deola and Dongerpur and thence to Edur, a principality in the outskirts of Mewar. They flew over the heights of the insurmountable Aravalis. They met the chief of the Bhils and with his help, reached Kumbhalmir. Panna sought an interview with Asa Sah, the then governor of the castle and was conducted into the Hall.

"Allow me to intimate to you, gracious lord!" said Panna, "that this is Udai Singh, your sovereign. Take him into your lap and protect him."

"Incredible." ejaculated the officer, with the wildest surprise and asked "Was not Udai Singh put to death by Vanaveer?"

"True it is, Vanaveer came to kill Udai Singh." she replied, "But I had substituted my own child for him. Vanaveer murdered my son and thought he had put the Prince to death. I have sacrificed my all in this world to preserve the only

remnant of the Sesodia House. I appeal to your mercy. Pray, give him shelter."

"Try not to heap dangers and calamities over my head," cried out Asa Sah, with fear, "I already live in a glass house. Vanaveer is a cruel king and I am in dread of him. If you persist to leave the boy here, I shall be forced to hand him over to Vanaveer. The sooner you depart from here the better for me."

"Coward!" vociferated the mother of Asa Sah, rushing forth from an inner apartment, "dare you treat the adorable lady with discourtesy? Though a woman, she made a world of sacrifice. Angels could not have done better. Celestials should have congratulated her by showering flowers upon her! The noblest mother has saved the Rajput race from extinction. The Kings of Mewar have reared you up from your childhood. Armies are maintained for years to be used on a single day — at a single hour! Fidelity knows no dangers. Go on — receive your master!"

"Pardon me, good mother!" apologised the governor, "for the momentary weakness on my part, I would adore the lady as the saviour of my monarch." He took Udai Singh on his lap. Panna felt an immense relief. She did not, however, remain at Kumbhalmir, lest, her presence should arouse suspicions. When the governor offered some money, our heroine refused, saying, "why? my son is beyond the need, you see! — and the Prince is off my hands." Time rolled on.

The festival of Florialia was celebrated on a grand scale and, one day, the chiefs and the nobles were seated, according to their ranks, at the great banqueting-Hall at Chittore. It was an ancient custom in Mewar that on these merry occasions the Maharana used to bestow on his vassals a portion of the plate of which he partook, of course, honouring first the most deserving one — the Saloombra. The nobles and the chiefs used to receive the dhonah with great reverence from their Maharana.

“Chieftains and nobles!” addressed Vanaveer, “it would be exhilarating to preserve the sacred customs of the land. I am pleased to honour all of you with dhonah. I command Sahi Das to come forth and receive the honour first as the Saloombra.”

“By calling me to accept the dhonah,” flared up Sahi Das, in a tone highly dignified, “you have insulted the Chondawut House in particular and the nobility of the country in general. This honour, as proffered by the hand of a true son of Bappa Rao, was sacred. Bastards are not entitled to give it. Have you forgotten that you are the offspring of a hand-maid called Srithulasi? You do not belong to any one of the four superior grades of the country. You are the fifth son of Mewar. I would, therefore, refuse to accept the dhonah from your hand.”

The gallant chief turned his back and left the Hall. All the nobles followed him in a body to his quarters. They had mutual consultations. Panna Bai put forth the cause of Udai Singh.

Simha Rao of Deola, Aswakarn of Dongerpur and the Chohan Chieftain of Kotario swore that they knew the Prince from his childhood, Panna brought him to them, the very next day, after the death of Vikramajit and that they recognised and were satisfied about his identity. All the chieftains then started to Kumbhalmir. As a signal illustration of the decay of the authority of Vanaveer, they seized, on the way, the dower of his daughter, a caravan of five hundred horses and ten thousand oxen, laden with valuable things and guarded by one thousand Gherwal Rajputs and they took it to Kumbhalmir. There, they formed themselves into a grand court, over which Sahi Das presided. Asa Sah presented Udai Singh before them. Sahi Das examined him and was satisfied. The chieftain of Kotario, to set aside all doubts, ate of the same platter with the Prince. The Chondawut Premier girt him with the sword and proclaimed him as the Maharana of Chittore. All the nobles, except Maloji of Thana and the Solanki of Maholi, attended and paid their homage. Akhila Raj, the Sonegurra Prince of Jhalore, gave his daughter, Karuna Devi to Udai Singh and the marriage was celebrated with great pomp at Balhi.

Sahi Das, who had succeeded his father, Kanak Singh, led an enormous cavalry against Vanaveer. He met Maloji and Solanki on his way to the capital when, the former was slain and the latter surrendered. Vanaveer held himself fast within the capital. The great Premier block-

aded the castle. The minister of Vanaveer, who was an ardent admirer of Sahi Das, admitted into the fort one thousand resolute Chondawut cavaliers in the midnight. The guards fell victims to them and the capital was in the hands of the Saloombra chief, before the next day dawned.

Sahi Das deposed Vanaveer, who immediately took to his heels into Deccan with his family and subsequently became the founder of the House of the Nagpur Bhonslaes. Elaborate were the preparations made for the coronation. The Court Hall was tastefully decorated. Many potentates of the surrounding states graced the occasion. Udai Singh was installed on the throne of Chittore by Sahi Das in 1542 amidst hearty congratulations and great rejoicings. All the nobles paid their homage to the king. The song of joy reverberated throughout Hindusthan. Panna Bai was seated on a high-cushioned seat on the platform and was duly honoured. She was given a rich estate and a splendid pension. She, never for a moment, left her adopted son. Udai Singh, though the proudest sovereign of India, he was always to Panna, a child in her lap.

At times, there were tears of joy trickling down her cheeks, not however, unmixed with sorrow over her unprecedented sacrifice. What does a poor scientist know of the glory about these tears? He might even flippantly remark, "These tears are nothing, if not a liquid compound of Hydrogen and Oxygen." A good poet only can tell us "Oh, every drop is as holy as the Ganges and as rich as all the crowns on earth put together!"

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